

THE PRINCE OF DETECTIVES AGAIN!

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DEADWOOD DICK JR'S GOLD-DUST



OR,
**VOLCANO DAN'S
DESERTER.**

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEATH IN THE DESERT.

"GOLD! gold! gold! See! see! It is a king's ransom! Thrust in your hands and let the pieces run between your fingers—so. Ah! how cool it feels! More than we can

"I AM DEADWOOD DICK, JR., THE AVENGER!"

spend in our lives; and all ours, all ours! No more toil, no more poverty! We are rich, rich, rich! The great Velasque treasure is ours at last, at last!"

It was a pitiable scene that the full, round, luminous moon looked down upon.

One of the wild southwestern deserts, afar from the habitations of men, where even the prowling coyotes scarce ventured; a place of fearful desolation.

Not a desert of sand, as level as the sea, but one of barren rock and lava, ragged, disordered, as if here Nature had set apart a place for the refuse from a created world. Not a leaf of vegetation anywhere in sight; not a living creature save alone these two.

On the ground lay a man raving in the delirium of a raging fever—a man past the middle age of life, lean, wrinkled, and with hair and beard almost a snowy white.

His companion was a young woman, maybe twenty-four years of age, who was wringing her hands in the dumb accent of despair, while tears streamed from her eyes.

She was good-looking, but hardship and privation had made inroads upon her beauty. She was plainly clad, in a dress of the most serviceable material, wore a pair of extra stout shoes, and her wide sombrero lay on the ground, while her luxuriant hair rested like a garment upon her shoulders.

"Father! father!" she moaned, "do not die! Do not leave me alone in this desert, or I shall go mad, mad! Oh! for one drop of water for his lips! My God! must he perish here! Father! father! Do you not hear my voice? Do you not know me? It is Freda, your Freda!"

"Look! look!" the delirious man cried, motioning with his arms. "It is all around us, Freda, all around us! More gold than any man ever possessed, and all ours, all ours! You shall ride in a carriage, my Freda; you shall have houses and lands; all the world shall bow at your feet! I knew it was here; I knew we should find it!"

"No, father; no, no! See! we are still in the desert; we have not yet come to the mountains; do you not see? You must rally, you must go on! My God! he must reach the mountains or he will die! What can I do? Father! father! We must go on! We must find water!"

"Water? Here it is, here it is! See it leap and laugh and dance in the sunlight! Do you not feel the cool spray? Do you not smell its freshness? Ah! ah! How good, how cool it is! More! more!"

With a scream the young woman covered her ears with her hands, and ran away, as if she could no longer bear to hear the piteous call.

But she could not go far; love chained her to the spot.

She returned, wringing her hands and praying aloud, and tried in vain to rouse her father to consciousness.

"Oh! why did I ever consent to come?" she moaned. "I should have known that he was mad. There is no fortune; it is all a myth; and even if there were, what good could it do to the finder? Even if he reached the mountain alive. Even if he discovered the hiding-place, even if he found the gold he could not carry it away; he could never escape with his life. It was madness, madness!"

"Freda! Freda! Where are you?" the dying man called. "Why do you not shout for joy? It was true, it was true! It was, no fable; here is the gold to prove it. I knew we should find it, I knew we should! See it! see it! It grows brighter and brighter! See it glitter! Hear it ring! The Velasque treasure found at last, at last! Are you not glad now that we came in quest of it? You distrusted the strang-

er, you disbelieved the story, you even doubted the papers he gave me in the hour he died; but I did not. See! see! Gold everywhere! Gold! gold! gold!"

The cold, calm moon, unmoved to pity, was the only witness, and her light only served to make the desolation the more terrible.

On every hand the barren landscape was given a false sheen of yellow splendor, as if to lure the beholder first this way and then that; but near at hand the grim reality was not to be disguised.

Afar off to the east, yet seemingly near at hand, was the dull outline of a mountain range, the shining, snow-capped tops of which seemed to be nearer than the base, as if trying to extend a hand of welcome, or rather of invitation, to the hapless travelers.

Hours passed—hours that wrought no change save to deepen the despair of the sorrowing daughter as she saw her father's strength growing less and less, and, at last, when the moon was nearing the horizon, with a long, deep sigh he breathed his last, and his breast fell to rise no more. He was dead, and his child was alone in that wild waste!

For hours she had listened to his wanderings; had helplessly heard his repeated call for water, until it was almost a relief to know that his suffering was at an end. Her last tears had long since been shed; the springs were dry. She rose with something of a stolid calmness.

"Ah, well, what does it matter?" she sighed. "Only a little while, and I shall join him over there, where the sad journey will be ended and a fortune found indeed. Poor father!"

For some time she stood silent, motionless, looking upon the dead form of her parent. Her impulse was to lie down beside him, and never move until the kind angel came and took her.

But youth and death are incongruous. She thought of the morrow's burning sun; of the thirst-torture that was already upon her, and which in a few hours would be maddening, and she looked longingly in the direction of the snowy peaks that seemed beckoning to her.

"No, no! I cannot! I dare not remain!" she cried aloud. "Forgive me, father, but I cannot stay. While you lived nothing could have torn me from your side; but now that you are dead, now that your spirit is no longer here, why should I remain? You would not wish it; I know you would forbid it could you speak to me from that better world."

She roused to action.

Searching her father's pockets, she took all his belongings and put them into her own pocket, and into her bosom.

Having done, she began gathering stones and detached portions of the desert lava, as large as she could carry, and these she arranged around the body of him she had loved.

She worked hard and fast to perform her task while the moonlight lasted, and its last departing beams saw the work done. The body had been buried under a pile of stones too large for any roving coyotes to remove, and after a minute of prayer, and a final sad farewell, she set her face resolutely in the direction of the mountains, and hastened from the scene.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN VOLCANO.

The leader of the little company leaped to his feet with an oath, glaring at his comrades ominously.

"There is a traitor among us!" he thundered. "The last time I saw this packet opened, the map was in it; now it is gone. Which man of you has taken it out?"

The others looked from one to another

in amazement. If one among them was guilty of the offense charged, he was so clever an actor that he could not be told from the others who were innocent in fact. Their looks of surprise were not to be doubted.

They were a party of ten.

The time was morning, and they had just breakfasted on the spot where they had passed the night.

It was a mountain scene; far above lay the snow-crowned summits, while just below stretched the dark-green line of timber. Out and beyond lay the dread desert wilderness.

Their ten horses were tethered a little distance apart from the place of their camp, where a slight growth of bush and grass had given the animals something to nibble, but not nearly enough for their needs.

They were rough men, all armed.

"Did you hear what I said?" the leader demanded, as no one spoke. "I tell you the map to the hiding-place of the treasure is gone!"

"Have ye opened all the papers?" one man inquired, in a tone of apology.

"Of course I have, Bill Davids! Didn't you see me do it? And now I demand to know what man of you has gone through this packet and stolen that map? He had better speak up quick. Fair warning!"

The leader's hand rested upon the butt of a pistol.

"Haden't you better be sure before you go to spillin' anybody's blood, Volcano Dan?" inquired another of the men. "I don't reckon there is anybody hyar but is willing to be searched, if you can't take our word fer it. Fer one, I haven't seen the map."

"No, nor me! Nor me!" and thus one and all protested their innocence.

"I don't say you did take it, Henry Huke, nor you, John Peet; but I do say that while eight of you may be telling me the truth, one of you surely lies!"

"If you are going to put it that way, search us, that is all," retorted Huke.

"Don't it stand to reason? The paper was there; now it is gone."

"When was it there?" asked yet another of the number, a fellow known among them as Bullet Bob.

"It was there when we set out, that's when," Volcano Dan declared, emphatically. "And this packet hasn't been out of my possession to my knowledge to the present time."

"Then how could anybody take the map out of it?" demanded Huke.

"By gettin' it out of my possession without my knowin' it," was the sharp retort.

"Are ye double sure it was in ther packet?"

"Of course I am sure. Didn't I see it put there with my own eyes? That was the bargain me and Long Scott made, and we both carried it out. I paid him his price, and he turned everything over to me."

"And you saw the map put into the packet then?" asked Bullet Bob.

"Blazes, yes!"

"Well, have you seen it since that time? That is the question, seems to me, hey, pard?"

"That's what et is," echoed Huke, better known as Hot Hen. And all the others agreed with him, dark looks appearing on more faces than one.

"I tell ye it was there when we set out, d'ye hear?" Volcano Dan thundered. "Do ye think I'm a fool? And now here is this hyar blank paper in the place of it!"

"Did you open the map and look at it?" once more queried Bullet Bob.

"Well, no; but as the packet hadn't gone out of my hands, it was there, of course."

"Yes, but since it is not there now, while

this blank piece of paper is, and as none of us took it, why it stands to reason that you have been fooled, it seems to me."

"Fooled!"

"Exactly. Maybe Long Scott made you think the map was there, and so got your money away from you."

"Do you take me for a fool, in fact? Do you think I would have paid a thousand dollars without knowin' what I was gettin'? I say some one of you has taken it!"

There was now a sullen silence.

While this was going on, the leader had once more gone through the contents of the packet, to make doubly sure the map was not there.

The men were all on their feet, every face wearing a grim expression, and they looked from one to another with somewhat of suspicion, now that the case appeared to be fastened upon them.

"What are you going to do about it?" fiercely spouted Volcano Dan. He was not inappropriately named.

"I'll tell you what," and Hot Hen stepped out from the others.

"Well, what?"

"Let every man be searched, and if it is found, death to that man. I think every one of us can agree to that—anyhow, every innocent man can do it and nothing to fear."

"That is the thing!"

"That is fair!"

So cried they all, in one way or another, and Hot Hen suggested further:

"Begin with me, Volcano Dan, and let there be no halfway business about it. I'll strip to the skin, if you say so."

"If you do that, no other man can have any excuse for holding back, and if that paper is not found I'll take it all back and admit that I am a fool and that I have brought you here on a fool's errand."

"Say no more; here goes."

Huke began to divest himself, tossing his garments to the chief of the party, and his clothing was searched in the most thorough manner.

"You have not got it," said Volcano Dan, finally. "I did not think you had, but it would be unfair not to serve all alike. Who is next? This is no boys' play, you will find."

"Search me," and John Peet began throwing off his jacket. "You are welcome to all that you kin find about me that looks like a map. Don't see what good it would do one of us to steal a map, anyhow, when it will take us all to get away with the treasure, even if we found it."

"There's no ifs or buts about it," cried the leader. "That map is missing and it has got to be found. If it is not found, we may as well give up the search for the Velasque treasure, and we've had our journey for nothing—unless the rest of these papers can give us the clew, which is not likely. What ought to be done to him, if a traitor is found?"

"Hang him!" was the hoarse cry from half a dozen throats at once.

That man passed through the same close inspection which had been given to Hot Hen, all the others standing by ready to respond as soon as called upon, every one of them with jacket off.

One after another they passed through the ordeal, until, finally, a discovery was made.

Bullet Bob, the seventh in number, had thrown Volcano Dan his coat, and had followed it up with his boots, and was still further divesting himself, when a cry from their chief drew attention.

He had picked up one of the boots and given it a shake, and, not satisfied with that, evidently, had looked into it, as he had done to the boots of the others, and something he saw therein was what caused him to utter the ejaculation mentioned.

"What is et?" cried Hot Hen.

"A secret pocket in his boot, as I live!"

"Ther mischief! But what of that; we want that map."

"And here it is," cried Volcano Dan, jerking a paper forth from the pocket in the boot.

"I rather guess not, sir," spoke Bullet Bob, with coolness. "That is only a sketch of a mine property I have got an interest in, over in New Mexico. You had better examine it, I think."

That Volcano Dan was proceeding to do.

CHAPTER III.

BURIED ALIVE.

It was a trying moment.

And, there in the mountain stillness, and in the bright morning sunlight, it was a unique proceeding.

Volcano Dan's face darkened as he looked at the paper critically, the cords in his neck stood out in a way that bespoke a coming eruption, which quickly followed.

"No!" he cried, "it isn't the map, but it is a copy of it, that I will swear to!"

Every face turned to Bullet Bob.

"If you do, you will swear to a great mistake, that is all," retorted the accused man, boldly, and without the least showing of fear. "Let the boys examine my paper."

"What will be the use of that?" demanded Dan. "They never examined the original, did they? I, however, have studied it many a time with Long Scott, and I declare that this is a copy of it! Boys, what is to be done with the traitor?"

"Hang him!" by three or four.

"Be jabers, he ought to have a fair trial, at dhe laste," spoke up an Irish member of the party, in favor of fair play.

"He has had it, Jerry McHearty," declared the chief. "He has been given the fairest kind of a trial, and found guilty. It is a case that speaks for itself louder than words; the dead wood is on him hard and fast, and he can't get out of it. I have suspected him for some time."

"Suspected me of what?" asked Bullet Bob.

"Of not being just what you seemed to be," Volcano asserted. "I have had my eye on you, I have."

"Then, if you suspected me, why did you not call me out the first one and go for me, without putting all the others to the disgrace and inconvenience of a search?"

"Hear that?" shouted Volcano. "Do you hear that, boys? That is one reason why I have been suspecting him, because he can reel off language like a lawyer, when he wants to. I tell you we have had a traitor in our midst, and this is the man. What is the fate of a traitor here?"

"Death!"

"Boys, hear what I have got to say, too," spoke up the accused man. "This paper found in my boot was in my possession when I joined your band. You have heard me explain what it is. I have not seen the map our captain is looking for, and I certainly have not had the packet to open it. This is all a mistake, and I want fair play."

"I tell you it is no mistake," asseverated Dan. "Don't let him palaver you with that slick tongue of his, boys. He has copied the map, in his own way, and destroyed the original. He meant to cheat you all out of your shares of the treasure."

"Is this a scheme to get rid of me, Dan Church?" Bullet Bob demanded.

"There is no scheme about it."

"Well, it looks so. I tell you and I tell all the rest that I have taken no paper or map away from you. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"What are we going to do about it? Have you not already heard the boys pro-

nounce sentence upon you? You have got to hang, that is what we are going to do about it!"

Every man had a hand on his gun, but quicker than any one else, Bullet Bob got his weapons to the fore.

"All right; open the ball!" he invited. "If you want fun, here it is, and you will find that I am called Bullet Bob for something—I will bob a bullet into the first man who tries to lay a hand on me!"

"Hear him?" vociferated Volcano. "Hear what he says? Is that the kind of a man we want in this party, boys? Well, I guess not! Ben and Billy, you take him and bind him. We have got all the proof we want, and this little family will be all the better off without him, anyhow."

"Hooray!" cried three or four. "Death to traitors!"

"You heard my warning," asserted Bullet.

It was an ugly situation, ugly alike for the accused man and for his accusers.

Half a dozen of them were ready to support the captain in anything, one or two were only half-hearted, and the Irishman, Jerry McHearty, was pale and silent.

"Did you hear my order?" reiterated Volcano.

As quick as thought the two men upon whom he had called sprang to obey him, but just as quick the bark of Bob's guns, and the foremost of the pair went headlong to the ground with a bullet in the forehead, while the other fell back with a bullet in his shoulder.

No sooner had he fired than the nervy fellow made a duck and dodge, as if knowing what to expect, and that movement saved his life, for Volcano Dan fired in almost the same instant, and one of his bullets just grazed Bob's head, for the moment causing him to stagger.

Before he could recover, half a dozen men had seized him.

"Now, curse you!" cried Volcano. "What do you expect is going to be done with you?"

"Hang him!"

"No, no! That is too good for him!"

"Burn him at the stake; that is what he deserves fer this crime!"

"We'll bury him alive!" declared Volcano, grimly. "That will give him plenty of time to repent!"

"You are a pack of cowards!" snarled the prisoner. "I wish I could have got about three or four more pops at you; that is all."

"That is the right talk for an innocent man, now, isn't it, pards? I tell you I have made no mistake, and we'll be well rid of him. By blazes! the man that crosses Volcano Dan dies!"

The prisoner had already been disarmed, and four of his captors were holding him secure. On his face on the ground lay the dead man and the other, Ben Small by name, was staggering around holding his shoulder, giving loud voice to commingled groans and curses.

"What'll we do with him, Cap'n Volcano?"

"Bind him and put him on his horse," was the stern order; "poor Billy the same. We'll take 'em down and bury 'em together, one dead and the other alive!"

"That is ther talk! That is what he deserves, cuss him!"

In another moment these directions were being carried out, and all was bustle and hurry incident to the breaking of camp. Things were gathered and packed and loaded, and by the time the prisoner had been bound upon his horse and the dead man tied across the back of his, all were ready to depart.

Volcano put himself at the head and gave the word; then the party moved down the rugged mountain trail in single

file. It was a solemn procession, and they were upon a serious business intent. Little was said, save between Volcano Dan and the man who seemed to be his right bower—a fellow called Coop Little. They conversed in low tones.

It could hardly be called a trail, for it certainly was not a traveled way; the leaders seemed to pick the course wherever they could find the best footing—as no doubt others had done before them, in time past.

In the timber their progress was even slower, for a fallen tree occasionally blocked their way, and had to be cut before they could proceed.

At last the leader called a sudden halt.

They were well down the mountain now, and a breath from the desert could be felt.

"Look here!" the leader called. "Here is a tunnel, natural or otherwise, and we must have a look into it before we proceed further. No telling what it may pan."

He dismounted, others doing the same, save two, who were ordered to remain and guard the prisoner, and all save these entered the dismal opening and disappeared from view. It was some minutes before they returned, when they reported that nothing was there.

Nothing? They had discovered a place of wash sand, filling a deep crevice, and one of the party had suggested that it would be an excellent place in which to bury the traitor and his victim.

"No, there's nothing there," protested Volcano Dan, waving the torch he had carried into the open place, "but we will put something there, by blazes! Take down that body, boys, and some of you dismount the prisoner. Bullet Bob, we have found a nice garden spot for you!"

The orders were quickly obeyed.

With the torch the captain of the party led the way; he was followed by those who had the prisoner in charge, and after these came others, bearing the body and a couple of shovels.

The tunnel-like cavern ran back for some distance with one or two turns, and its far end was buried in darkness impenetrable. The light of the torch dispelled the shadows, however, for the time being, and revealed along one of the side walls the drift of sand and debris we have mentioned.

"There," said Captain Volcano, pointing to the place, "dig there the grave and make it large enough for two. It is too bad to have to bury Billy Green in such a hole, but for this traitor, it is just the place! What do you think of it, Bullet Bob? You will have time for reflection here before death comes to your release, and you will see the folly of trying to deceive Captain Volcano!"

"You are a coward at heart," the prisoner, with force of utterance. "Release me, and I will fight for my life against any two of your gang!"

"Ha! ha! Oh, no; we prefer to have it our own way."

"I see you do, coward!"

Other taunts followed, but the prisoner would not notice them. He maintained a stubborn silence while the hole was being prepared, and at last it was deep enough, and the body of the dead man was laid in it. That having been done, the prisoner was thrust in next, and the filling began.

The prisoner's head was supported, and he was buried to the shoulders, and the sand was stamped down upon him until it would have been almost impossible for him to move, even if he had not been bound.

Thus they left him, with jeer and taunt, and went away, leaving him to a linger-

ing, horrible death there in that dark, cold hole, where, perchance, no human being would enter again in a decade of years.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HERMIT OF THE HILLS.

"My God! and must I perish after all?"

So plaintive the cry, it seemed almost like the final sigh of a breaking heart.

Again and yet again did Freda call, to attract their attention, again and yet again wave her hat; but there was no responding signal, no sign that she had been seen or heard.

Slowly the horsemen filed out from her range of vision, along the side of the mountain where a break in the timber had for a space revealed their presence, and she saw them no more. She was alone, with nothing but the burning desert, the coppery sky, and the mountains.

Throwing herself upon the burning lava she cried aloud, in half anguish and half prayer.

All the way from the place where she had left her father's body some hours before, this young woman had plodded, weary, footsore, almost dying of thirst, and at last she was near the mountains.

Another hour, could she but hold out, and she would be able to reach them, and there, perchance, find water. If not, at any rate it seemed to her that death would be far less terrible under the shade of the green trees on the side of the mountains than out there upon the burning wastes.

She was pushing on and on, every step costing her a wince from pain, her eyes fixed steadily upon the dark timber line on the mountain sides, when of a sudden something caused her to stop short and put her hands over her eyes for a better view. It looked like horsemen—yes, yes! it was! And then she began to wave and call, running forward unmindful of her sore, tired feet.

But the distance was too great for her voice to carry; the horsemen rode steadily on and disappeared, as shown.

"My Father!" she prayed. "Why has this fate been reserved for me? I cannot go on; I cannot lie here to die. My God, help me!"

A hundred times had she prayed thus, and each time had seemed to give her renewed courage, renewed strength, but it was plain that her strength was failing.

Her lips were black and cracked and bleeding, her eyes felt hot and dry in their sockets, her head was aching and her hands and feet were cold and hot by turns; she must soon succumb.

But yet again did Freda struggle to her feet; once again did she struggle onward under the blazing sun, her eyes fixed as before upon the line of timber, and now a new hope had been born in her breast. It was no delusion, that which she had seen.

Fellow creatures were not far away; she would strike their trail, she would follow them, and they would save her at last.

On, and on, and yet tottering on!

Let us not dwell upon the picture of her sufferings. At last, half creeping, half dragging herself, she came to the first friendly shade at a point where the greener hue of the foliage had been more attractive.

There, as if her prayer had been answered and an unseen angel had guided her aright, she found not only shade, but a clear, cool, deep spring of pure water! With a glad cry, which, from her parched throat had more the sound of some animal than of human voice, she spent her last remaining particle of strength in reaching the edge of the basin.

When she came to—for she had no recollection of the long, cooling draught, the departing sun was low in the West.

She sprang to her feet, and found that

the life blood was once more coursing coolly through her body, and that her strength had, in part at least, returned. She had a gnawing hunger, however, and realized instantly her new danger.

A thought of her father, lying so far, far out upon that desolate waste, and tears sprang to her eyes. The next moment recollection of the horsemen she had seen, and she dashed the tears resolutely away and turned her face to the scenes at hand.

It was then that she made the discovery that a beaten pathway led from the spring up into the timber, and she believed that she must be near some habitation.

Kneeling at the spring, she drank again of its life-giving water, and taking up water in her hat, bathed her hands and face.

With each passing moment her strength renewed, for youth can stand much suffering and quickly recover its buoyancy when the conditions change, and soon she turned to follow the path she had discovered.

At that moment a sound came to Freda's ears.

She stopped short and listened. She was not mistaken; it was a step approaching.

Her first thought was to conceal herself, but she was too late, for even as the thought came into her mind the approaching person came into sight and she was discovered.

The young woman uttered a scream, and the strange creature stopped short and stared at her.

It was a man, but one so old that his skin was like parchment, and his eyes, like two small, bright beads, seemed out of place in so aged a setting. Head and face were covered with one long, tangled mat of yellow-white hair and beard, and for garments he wore skins.

For a moment neither moved nor spoke.

"So, you have come at last, have you?" the aged creature broke the silence. "I have waited long for you."

He spoke in Spanish, and the girl recoiled from him, fearing that he was a madman. Certainly his words were far from proving that he was sane, for she had never seen him before.

"Sir, I know you not," she gasped.

"No, but I know you; you are a Velasque, and you have come to claim the treasure. It is well, for I can guard it no longer; I shall turn the guardianship over to you."

The young woman now stared in wonder.

"You mistake," she hastened to declare. "My name is not Velasque, but Peters—Freda Peters—"

"Not a Velasque—you, with that face, not a Velasque? Ha, ha, ha! My child, I would know your face a thousand years hence, could I live so long—and it seems to me I am twice that old now."

"But, sir, I have spoken truly; that is not my name."

"No matter; you came for the Velasque fortune, or you would not be here. No one would come to this region and place for any other purpose."

More amazed than ever, the girl could only stand and stare, no longer thinking him mad, but wondering who he could be and marveling at his knowledge. He had spoken truly; the Velasque treasure was responsible for her being there, for her father's death, for all the suffering through which she had passed.

"You do not deny it," said the old man, after a moment's pause, during which his bead-like eyes had seemed to pierce her through; "you do not deny it, because I have spoken the truth. You could not deceive me if you would."

"It is true, sir, that we came here for that purpose—"

"We—you say we?"

"My father lies yonder on the desert, sir, where he died last night. I came on alone, guided by the snow-caps of the mountains—"

"You crossed the desert? You crossed from that side, where no human being ever crossed it? I can but doubt you. But, ha! I see your trail, I see where you crept to the spring! It was God guided you!"

As he said that he bowed with reverence.

"Come," he said, the next moment, "you need food; you are famishing; I see it in your face. Come with me, and fear not, for you are the one sent to relieve me and let me enter into my rest. Come."

Pausing only long enough to fill a vessel he carried, for which purpose he had evidently come to the spring, he turned and walked away up the path, motioning the girl to follow his footsteps. And this she did, her hunger coming to mind with renewed force at the mention of food.

The path wound in and out among the rocks and trees for a considerable distance, ascending, and at last terminated in a small clearing, on the further side of which was a small log house.

Straight to this tenement the aged hermit led the way, and on reaching it he opened the door and stood aside for the girl to enter, bowing with as much deference as if he recognized in her a princess whose subject he was and to whom it was proper that he should bend.

CHAPTER V. AGAIN LEFT ALONE.

It was a strange habitation.

The first thing to claim attention was a burning lamp, although it was not yet night.

This lamp was in itself a peculiar thing. It had been cut out of onyx, and a globe over the flame was as bright as if it had been cut from a mammoth pearl. The young woman looked at it admiringly.

Besides the lamp, there was no other spot of beauty anywhere in the room. There was a rude couch of skins, a rude table, a clumsy fireplace, on which a few embers smoldered. A rusty gun hung on the wall, while a long bow and a supply of arrows stood in one corner.

On a shelf over the rude fireplace was a small crucifix and a bible, so worn that it hardly resembled a book longer.

After a survey of the room the young woman turned to the hermit.

"Welcome to a Velasque," he said, bowing. "No matter if that is not your name, the blood is there; you are descended from a daughter, no doubt. If it were not so, you would not be here. Welcome."

"You said you had food?" asked the young woman.

That was her pressing need, and the craving was so great that she had to remind him.

"Yes, yes, and I beg your pardon. I have food, such as it is; meat and herbs are my only fare. If you can wait till I can make you a broth—"

"No, no. Let me have the meat as it is, I beg."

He opened a small door that revealed a vault cut into the earth against which the rear of the cabin abutted, and from a peg took down what looked to be a stuffed skin.

Such it was, but the stuffing was a pressed mixture of meat and herbs, which, when she tasted it, the famished young woman thought was the sweetest food she had ever put into her mouth. The hermit gave her only such a quantity as he thought prudent, for the time, and put the rest away.

"This is something I must teach you to

make," he said, while she ate ravenously. "I must teach you all that I have learned by experience during the long years I have dwelt here, for you will need to know if your guardianship proves as long as mine has been. My days are numbered. I must soon go the natural way, and you will have to take my place. You must know how to trap game, to prepare the meat, the herbs to use, how to prepare the candles for the lamp—a hundred things must I teach you in the brief time that is left to me."

"I hope that I shall have no need for the knowledge, sir," said the young woman, when she had finished eating what had been given her.

"And why?" he inquired.

"I hope that rescue is at hand. I saw horsemen pass along the mountain side this morning—"

"Horsemen?"

"Yes; there were eight of them if I counted aright. I saw them from out on the desert, and I tried to make them see me, but failed."

"Then they are no friends of yours; I feel that to be so. If they were, they would have known that I am waiting here, and would have sought me out. No, no; my child; they are foes, foes!"

"You alarm me."

"And with good reason. Were they friends, they would know of me, they would bring a map of the hiding place, and they would be prepared to take the treasure away with them. No, no; have faith in my words, my child, and do not seek them, for no good can come of it to you."

The young woman looked the alarm she felt.

"You have seen them?" she inquired.

"No, I have not seen them; I have been away all day in quest of game, for in the summer I have to lay by my store for winter."

"Then I cannot doubt but they would befriend me enough to take me away from here, and you, too, if you will go. We must find them, sir, and I must cast myself upon their mercy."

"No, no! It must not be; it shall not be. You have been sent to occupy my place as guardian of the treasure, and you must not shirk the duty. Besides, they would learn the secret, they would slay and rob you, and the Velasque treasure would be scattered to the winds. No, no, no!"

"You told me, sir, that no one would come here for any other purpose than to get the treasure."

"And I told you truly, I thought. These may be evil men who have learned something of the secret, and have come to search. Were they honest, they would have come straight to me."

"What is this treasure, sir? Tell me what I should know about it. I am ignorant concerning it."

"Yet you admitted you had come here for it."

"It was my father, sir. I would never have come but for him, and I believe that he was mad. Only a madman would have attempted to cross the desert as he did."

"And you tell me that he was not a Velasque?"

"His name was Henry Peters."

"Then the blood in you is from your mother, for I cannot be mistaken in you. Tell me, how came your father to know of this treasure? By what means did he hope to find it?"

"He learned of it through a stranger who came to our home and died there, and who, before he died, told my father the story of the treasure, and placed in his hands a map, which, he said, would disclose where it was hidden. My father thought of the

matter day and night, and at last it had such a hold upon him that he resolved to set out alone to find it."

"Yet he brought you with him?"

"Because I would not allow him to depart all unattended, and because I would not remain alone at the alqueria. My mother being dead, we two were alone and all in all to each other."

"And that stranger, what was his name?"

"He said he was called Long Scott. We knew him by that name."

"And what did he tell concerning the Velasque treasure? Tell me all, for it is vital."

"I know only what my father repeated to me, that a vast treasure had been concealed by a colony of Spanish settlers when they were obliged to flee from Mexico for safety, many years ago."

"That is true, that is correct. Here is the whole story, in brief, my child: Years ago, when the revenues from the great ranches, and from the grape, olive and orange plantations of the missions were becoming enormous, the Spanish government sought to steal from the priests the fruits of their labors, and usurped the lands, planting pueblos, freeing the Indian neophytes and filling them with thoughts of murder to accomplish their own ends. I was a priest, then, my child, and many a scene of butchery did I witness."

"Well, it became intolerable; life was in danger; and finally our mission and people resolved to flee into other territory to escape the persecution. All the wealth of the people was brought together in one place and put into one common treasure, over which armed men were set guard. It was an enormous wealth, and it was our resolve that it should not fall into the hands of our foes, even if the hiding of it cost every man of us his life. We started, taking everything we possessed in the world, and sought the nearest point of this range of mountains. Ah! the horrors of that exodus! The bones of men, women and children line the whole distance of the trail. We reached here, and here the treasure was left, of necessity, and I alone remained to guard it."

"In a year, or two, at the most, they were to send for it, but they never came, and full seventy summers and winters have passed since I began my lonely guardianship."

"Mercy! how old you must be!"

"Yes, my child, I am one hundred and thirteen years old! My simple and plain and pious existence here has prolonged my years far beyond the allotted span. But the end is near; I have felt it of late, and I have prayed earnestly for the coming of some one to take my place that I might lay down these bones and depart. And that prayer has been answered; you are here, and to you must I commit the trust, to you, a Velasque—your family, you must know, were at the head of our community, and for them it was named. As in days of old a certain family were made custodians of the Ark, so this family were given the keeping of the treasure of all, since to them the greater bulk of it belonged. But the family and the mighty company that passed this way, where are they now? Alas, alas! You may be the last remaining one, for aught I know; but no, it can hardly be, for they were many. Ah! it comes, it comes! So soon, my God, so soon? Well, it finds thy servant ready, yet I would have remained—would have taught—would—Ah!"

During the past few minutes a change had been working in his face, as the young woman had noted, and at last, staggering partly to his feet, he gave voice to the words quoted above and fell lifeless to the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

DIRECTED BY PROVIDENCE.

Freda Peters leaped to her feet with a cry.

She could not believe that it was so; she could not realize that for the second time she had been left entirely alone.

She looked upon the form of the old, old man, with the long, whitish tangle of hair and beard, the hands like claws, the garments of skins; and in abject fear she ran screaming from the shanty.

She had not thought of fear, after the first great shock on seeing him at the spring, while his gentle spirit was present, but now that it was gone and the clay was tenantless, she was afraid of the almost hideous-looking form, and obeyed her first impulse.

Across the open space she ran, and did not stop until she reached the pathway that led to the spring.

She had by that time ceased her cries, and now she recovered her self-possession.

"How foolish of me to be afraid of him, now that he is dead, if he did not harm me when living," she said to herself. "I must go back there, for where else am I to spend the night?"

It was already growing dark.

Reluctantly she retraced her steps in the direction of the cabin, the very stillness of the place filling her with awe.

She was nearing the door, when faintly and far away she heard a cry—a cry for help it seemed to be, and she stopped short to listen, pressing her hand to her chest as if to still the beating of her heart.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"There was no mistaking the call, faint as it was and afar off as it seemed to be.

Some man was calling for help, and the listener realized that perhaps hers were the only human ears that heard his cry.

What was she to do? In a few minutes it would be dark; she was a stranger there, and would certainly be lost if she ventured away from the cabin; and yet could she refuse?

"Help! Help! Help!"

Again to her ears came the appealing appeal, a little louder than before, perhaps, yet so faint and far away that the slightest sighing of the trees must have drowned it, had there been a breath of air stirring. And while she listened she heard it yet again.

"I cannot refuse," she said to herself, heroically. "What if God had refused to hear my cry when I was perishing there on the desert? No, no; I cannot refuse!"

She ran into the cabin and caught up the lamp, and, reappearing, started with it in the direction whence the cry had been heard.

She was without her hat, and only intent upon the mission before her.

There was no wind stirring, as said, so she could venture with the lamp safely, and was surprised to find that the motion of walking did not disturb the flame.

It was a thing of peculiar construction, and had no doubt cost the hermit years and years of labor to produce it. The flame was supplied by something having the appearance of a candle, but which seemed to burn away more slowly and yet which gave out a far brighter light.

It was not dark enough for the lamp to be of service yet, but the young woman knew that it soon would be. Besides, it was company for her.

She entered the woods, and by chance struck into a path.

No further repetition of the call had been made, and as she reflected upon it a thought struck her. Perhaps the person, whoever it was, had heard her screams when she ran out of the cabin.

Stopping, she called as loudly as she could, and listened.

"Help! Help! Help!"

Back to her ears came the cry once more, and with fast-beating heart, she pushed forward, the path taking her in the right direction.

Partly walking and partly running, she made all the haste she could, until, finally, the path had made several windings and she was no longer sure that she was going in the right direction, when she stopped and called again.

Back again came the cry, this time on her left, while the path seemed inclined to bear away to the right, and she halted, fearful of following the path further lest it might lead her away from rather than toward the person who was calling for assistance.

However, she ran a little further along the path, until it turned yet further to the right, when she stopped and ran back again to the point where she had last heard the call.

She shouted once more, and getting the response again, climbed through the undergrowth and up the rocks in the direction whence the cry came.

It was dark, now, and the lamp was of greatest service.

When she had climbed and clambered until she was well-nigh out of breath, she paused for a moment to rest, and when she had recovered her breath she called again.

Back came the cry as before, and this time it seemed near at hand, in spite of the fact that it sounded strangely faint.

What did it mean? Was some one trying to decoy her? Perhaps it was a haunting spirit.

The latter, however, she dismissed at once, for the brave little woman was above such superstition. She pressed on, climbing up over the ragged projections and pulling herself through the tangled undergrowth, till presently she came out upon what seemed a plateau.

Here she stopped again to rest, and while she rested she looked around her. True, she could not see far, but the lamp lighted up her immediate surroundings. Directly in front of her was a dark opening that had the appearance of a mining tunnel, or a natural cavern in the side of the mountain, and she drew away from it with a feeling of dread.

When she had once more recovered her breath, she shouted as before, and the result this time startled her.

Clear and distinct and near at hand was the voice that responded, and it seemed to come from the open tunnel just across the plateau. It gave her such a start that for a moment she was helpless.

"Who are you?" she demanded, as soon as she could speak.

"An honest man in a desperate situation," came back the response. "I am here in the tunnel, helpless."

"How came you there?" the young woman asked.

"I was put here by a band of ruffians, who left me to die by inches. I am buried alive. In the name of God I implore you to come to my rescue, whoever you are."

It was enough—the words, the tone; they were not to be doubted.

The girl hastened across the open space and boldly entered the tunnel, holding the lamp above her head to light her way.

Thus she proceeded, her strong shoes making her footsteps resound on the rock floor, and in another minute, after one or two turnings, a terrible sight burst upon her.

There, buried nearly to his neck, was a young and good-looking man, left, as he had said, to die by inches.

"Heavens!" the young woman cried.

"What inhuman fiends did this?"

"A band upon whom the hand of venge-

ance now shall fall," was the grim answer. "God has heard my supplication, all thanks to Him!"

"But, sir, who are you? Why did they put you here? What crime have you done, that they took so terrible a revenge upon you as this? But you have done no crime; I read it in your face."

"No, I have done no crime, you guess aright; they put me here to hinder me from bringing about the ends of justice and foiling them in their evil design. As to who I am, I suppose I may as well tell you that, for your face proves to me that you are to be trusted. I am Deadwood Dick, Junior."

CHAPTER VII.

THREE AGAINST SEVEN.

The young woman listened, with parted lips and bated breath.

He it was, the redoubtable Richard, hero of a hundred adventures, and this marked a new phase in his checkered life.

"I do not know you, sir," she said, "but I believe you, and I must somehow dig you out, for you look half dead with cold. How long have you been here?"

"Yes, I am chilled to the bone," Dick responded. "I have been here since early morning, and a few hours more of it would finish me off. I can soon get out, with your help, though it was impossible for me to do so entirely alone. Who are you?"

The young woman told him her name, while she sought a level projection on which to place the lamp, and having found such a spot and put the lamp down, she turned to lend assistance where it was so badly needed. Dick directed her what to do, and making his neck stiff, she took hold behind his head and lifted with all her strength.

Dick, at the same time, wriggled his body all he could, and the two forces together had the effect to loosen the earth from around his arms and shoulders. A second trial, and the young woman could reach with her knife the thongs that bound his arms, and once he had the use of his hands the rest was easy.

In a few minutes more he was out and free.

But he was so stiff that he could hardly stand. The cold seemed to have penetrated to the very marrow of his bones.

"Let us hasten out of here," he urged. "I must get warm, and the fact that you brought a lamp with you, leads me to suppose that you live near by."

"Yes, the cabin is not far away," said Freda, not wanting to waste time to explain further. "We will go straight there, and we can soon build up a fire so that you can get warm."

"That must be the first thing on the programme, or I shall be down sick from this exposure. That first, and then, Providence willing, I will square the account with the fiend who left me here to die a death so horrible. I will cause him to wish he had never been born."

So fierce these threats, that the young woman glanced at him with a feeling of fear.

She had taken up the lamp, and they were making their way out.

In another moment they were at the opening, where, to their surprise, they came face to face with a man.

"Whoap, be jabbers!" was the immediate exclamation. "Sure, is it spook or spalpeen dhat me two eyes behold? Bullet Bob, is it ye'rsel', and not yure shade dhat Oi see?"

"Jerry McHearty!" exclaimed Dick, wonderingly.

"Dhat same it is, sure enough!" was promptly admitted. "And who is dhis and phwere did she come from? Sure, Oi thought at first sight dhat it was an angel

dhat had yure spirit in tow fur a better wurru'd, so Oi did. It is a good job ye have done, miss, whoever ye are."

"But what brought you here?" Dick demanded. "Are you for me or against me, Jerry?"

"As if Oi would be here av Oi was against ye!"

"Then you have deserted from Captain Volcano?"

"Dhat same Oi have, body and boots! Be jabbers, Oi couldn't rest a'zy, wi'd you back here in dhis hole buried to yure chin, so Oi took French l'ave, afther Oi had taken about everyt'ing else dhat Oi could lay me two hands upon, be gob! and here Oi am. Sure, it was at dhe risk av me loife, but phwat av dhat, whin it was wi'd dhe good intint av saving yures?"

"Give me your hand," cried Dick, extending his. "I had singled you out as the one worthy fellow of the bunch, and I am glad to find that I was not mistaken."

They shook hands heartily, and Dick added:

"This lady is Miss Peters, who was about to take me to her home, and I doubt not but she will allow you to accompany us thither."

"I shall be only too glad," assented Freda.

"Dhen let us be off," urged Jerry, "fur by dhe way ye are shiverin', ye must be near dead wi'd a chill— By dhe same token, phwat am Oi thinkin' about? Oi have a dhrap av dhe craytur here in me flask, so Oi have! Here, down wi'd it, fur be jabbers ye nade it!"

He produced a flask from an inner pocket, and Dick eagerly sampled its contents.

"Just what I did need, sure enough, Jerry," he said, handing the flask back again. "I begin to feel the effect of that at once, and I believe it will go far toward staving off serious trouble. Now, Miss Peters, lead us."

"Yes, if I can find the way back again," said the young woman. "We must descend just here to find the path."

She indicated the place where she had clambered up.

"If you can find the way?" queried Dick. "Then you are not well acquainted here?"

"No; I was never here before in my life, sir. I wandered here to-day from far out on the desert, and barely reached here with my life. I will tell you my story later."

"But the cabin—whose cabin is it?"

"That of an aged hermit, who rescued me at the last moment, and who is now dead. Perhaps you heard me scream."

"I did; and it was that that led me to call for help. It seems to me that the hand of a kind Providence is in it all. The longer I live the harder I am inclined to lean upon that unseen Arm."

"Begorra, it is loike a bit av a romance, so it is," declared the Irishman.

"It will be grim reality before we get done, I think," assumed Dick.

No more was said, then, and with the lamp in hand, the young woman set out to find her way back again to the path by which she had come.

It seemed even harder work than it had been to climb up, when she was obeying the call for help, and she wondered how she had ever managed to scale such a rugged height.

She soon gave up all attempt to follow the exact way by which she had come, since that was next to impossible, but by turning this way and that, wherever an inviting foothold offered, she finally accomplished the desired end and came out into the beaten path.

From that point to the cabin was an easy stage, and they were soon at their destination.

The young woman entered first.

At sight of the body of the old hermit, Deadwood Dick and Jerry could not repress a start.

"Shades av ould Methuselah!" exclaimed Jerry.

"He must have been an old man, indeed," agreed Dick. "And a hermit, true enough, Miss Peters."

The young woman told in brief what the old man had told her concerning himself, and ended with mention of the hidden Velasque treasure of which he had been the guardian for so many years.

"The Velasque treasure?" repeated Dick.

"Yes, sir. It was that which brought my father to this wild land."

"Indeed! I must hear your story, then, Miss Peters; you can tell it while I am blowing up a fire."

Dick busied himself at the hearth, aided by Jerry, while the young woman told her story as it has been made known to the reader, and by the time she had done a cheerful fire was blazing.

"It is remarkable," said Deadwood Dick, when he had heard all. "My own mission here is the same, to find and recover that lost treasure. I see you star, Jerry, but it is true; Captain Volcano was more than half right when he charged me with being a spy."

"Dhen it was ye'rsel' dhat took dhe map—"

"No, I did not do that; he was wrong on that point; the copy I had in my possession was given me by the Mexican Government, in whose employ I am."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the young woman. "Then the Long Scott who gave the map to my father must have been the man who stole it from your Captain Volcano, and it must have been his intention to find it for himself."

"Beyond doubt; but death took a hand in the game, and he had to drop out of it. There is now going to be a struggle for that fortune, I foresee, and it remains to be seen which side will come out on top. Those fellows will no doubt be after you, Jerry, and if it comes to a pinch we are only three to their seven."

"Divil a whit nade we care fur dhat!" the true-hearted Irishman cried. "We have dhe roight on our side, and dhat is half dhe battle!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK AND THE BURIED TREASURE.

Dick and Jerry, having made a roaring fire, took up the body of the hermit and laid it on the couch, covering it for the time being with one of the skin coverlets.

Dick was by this time recovering rapidly from the cold and stiffness he had suffered, and the craving of hunger was strong upon him. The young woman knew where the hermit's store of provisions was, and in a little while she had laid the table with such as she could find.

All were hungry, and for a time nothing further was said, or very little. Their hunger appeased, however, they fell again into conversation.

"I have heard your story, Miss Peters," said Dick, "and that of this old hermit, as he told it to you, but you have not heard mine. I will tell it now, in order that there may be a full understanding all around."

"I am eager to hear it," said Freda.

"And mesel' dhe same," cried Jerry. "Sure, it is a mystery to me ye have been and still are, Bullet Bob."

"That was only a name for the occasion, Jerry."

"Only a name fur dhe occasion—"

"Yes; I am the chap that is best known as Deadwood Dick, Junior, if you ever heard—"

"Not Deadwood Dick, dhe invincible de-

tective?" cried the Irishman, his eyes open to the widest. "By dhe powers, it is glad Oi am dhat Oi have turned me back upon that band av rascals, fur dhe goodness help dhem now, says Oi!"

"And now, Miss Peters, for the story, which I will bring down to as few words as possible. A part of it you have had from the lips of the old hermit; the rest I will supply. That company of people never reached civilization, save a few as stragglers. They were massacred."

"How horrible!"

"Yet true, nevertheless. This mountain range, as you may or may not be aware, stands like an island in the desert. Well, when that company, or that portion that escaped the horrors of the desert, reached the other side, they were fallen upon by the invading Spanish and murdered for the treasure they were supposed to have with them. Only a mere handful of them escaped, and no wonder that this old man waited in vain for their coming."

"Well, this fortune is, an immense one, and a descendant of one of the Velasque family mentioned, has placed the matter in the hands of the government, offering half of the treasure to the government for aiding him in recovering it, and I have been employed to investigate the matter and report. I consider it a big trust to be reposed in me, but my clean record gave the government confidence in me. Well, I set out, intending to make the journey entirely alone, but what was my surprise, on falling in with Captain Volcano and his band, to learn that they were upon the same errand bent, save with a different motive."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the young woman.

"Begorra, it bates anything dhat Oi ever read in a tale," asserted the Irishman.

"It does smack of romance, that is true," admitted Dick. "But, as I said before, it is likely to be more like stern reality before we get done with it. Here we are, unarmed—"

"Arrah! hould yure whist, now," suddenly interrupted Jerry. "Didn't Oi tell ye dhat I took everyt'ing dhat Oi could lay me two hands on, to l'ave dhem something to remember me by? Sure, it is yure own guns Oi have brought back to ye, Bullet Bob, and—"

"Thank God for that!" cried Dick. "Now it does not look so hopeless, and we may be able to make it interesting for them yet."

"You can bet yure swate loife we will dhat same!" boasted Jerry. "Oi have me pockets full av shots fur dhe guns, and Oi have dhe guns av Billy Green besides me own. Oi dipped heavy into dhene shtore av ammunition, Oi'm telling ye!"

While speaking, the Irishman unloaded his supply of pistols and cartridges upon the table, and it made quite a formidable array.

"And I have a pistol of my own, and poor father's," spoke up the young woman.

"Be jabbers, it is a warm reception dhey will get av dhey come fooling around here, now moind ye!" cried Jerry.

Deadwood Dick took his weapons and examined them to see that they were in good working order, and finding that they were, deposited them in their proper places upon his person.

That done, he divided the cartridges among them, according as they would fit the weapons each possessed.

Their conversation had scarcely flagged for a moment, meantime.

"Now," said Dick, finally, "a sad duty is before us. We must give this aged body decent burial, Jerry."

"Wi'd all me heart," was the prompt response. "Sure, it is too bad he could not have lived a spell longer, fur dhen he

could have shown us dhe place phwere dhe treasure is hid."

"We must accept the situation as we find it. My map has been taken, but we have this better one that Captain Volcano bought and was cheated out of, which Miss Peters brought with her, and we shall stand the better chance of finding it."

"Oi bel'ave you are roight, on me word. But phwat shall we do fur a bit av a spade?"

"Let us look around here, and we may find one."

This led to a critical examination of their cabin, inside and out, and a spade of stone was discovered.

Many other things were found, besides, some of which they could not guess the purpose, think as they would. And for one thing, they found their cabin a much more substantial structure than they had at first taken it to be.

Selecting a spot in the clearing, they set to work to dig a grave, Freda holding the lamp so that they were enabled to see.

The grave finally prepared, they returned to the cabin for the body.

Dick made a search of the body, before they carried it out, but nothing was found, and it was wrapped in one of the coverlets of skins and reverently laid to rest.

That sad office having been performed, and the grave filled, they returned to the cabin.

Freda was silently weeping.

"What is the matter, Miss Peters?" Deadwood Dick asked, sympathetically.

"I was thinking of my poor father, sir, lying out there on the barren desert under a heap of stones. But I suppose it little matters, after all."

"Dhere is logic in dhat, sure," spoke up Jerry. "Undernayth dhe sod or at dhe bottom av dhe say, phwat is dhe difference afther dhe light has gone out and dhe spirit has gone home?"

A further examination of their abode, then, and an account taken of their supply of provisions on hand, and they prepared to retire for the night. They put up a curtain, dividing the room into two, giving the young lady the half containing the couch.

Dick and Jerry bunked on the floor in the other half, and in a little while all were in sleep profound.

They had secured well the door, of course.

Meanwhile, Jerry McHearty had been missed in the camp of Captain Volcano and his men.

Jerry had filled the post of cook, and had been left alone in the camp while the others were out with Volcano Dan, trying to verify some part of the map they had taken from Bullet Bob.

This gave Jerry just the opportunity he wanted, for he had been on the best of terms with Bullet Bob, and did not like to think of him as buried alive in the dark tunnel so far back along their trail, and he resolved to run all the risk and take advantage of the chance.

Accordingly, he had helped himself to what he could gather up, as he said, and got out.

They had gone into camp about the middle of the afternoon, and when Captain Volcano came in, as it was growing dark, and found no supper ready—in fact, no fire burning, there was an eruption.

Jerry was gone, and it took but a few minutes to ascertain that he had evidently bolted—vamoosed—deserted. He had taken no horse, for the obvious reason that the hoofs of the animal would have left a trail that would betray the direction he had taken; but that was shrewdly guessed.

"He has gone back to release Bullet Bob, that is where he has gone!" thun-

dered Captain Volcano. "He was rather thick with him, and I noticed that he had nothing to say when we condemned the traitor and sent him to his doom. Well, it is not far back there, and in the morning we'll return. If we catch them, we'll serve them both the same fate, by blazes!"

CHAPTER IX.

VOLCANO'S CLEVER DROP.

The trio at the cabin slept soundly till morning.

Jerry McHearty was the first astir, and his first moving around soon aroused Deadwood Dick.

"Dhe top av dhe marning to ye," saluted the Irishman. "Suppose we go out fur a whiff av fresh air and to be afther stretching av our legs a bit, dhe while dhe lady do be getting up."

"A thing I would have suggested myself, if you hadn't mentioned it," returned Dick, readily. "Bring that vessel along with you, and we'll find the spring and bring some water with us when we return." And then, hearing a stir behind the curtain: "Are you awake, Miss Peters?"

"Yes, I am up, sir."

"Well, we are going out, and will be back in twenty minutes or so."

So Dick and Jerry unfastened the door and passed out, and striking into the most-worn path, went in the right direction to the spring.

On the way there they discovered a broken vessel, which they carried along with them, and by means of which, on reaching the spring, they performed their morning ablutions.

When they returned to the cabin they felt like new men.

Freda had by that time made her toilet, and had wrought a great change in the appearance of the interior of the cabin.

The fire was blazing on the hearth, and she was preparing a breakfast of such as she could find in the cabin's larder. The old hermit had spoken of making a broth for her, on the previous evening, and acting upon that hint, she was boiling a certain kind of the meat mixture which she had discovered, hoping that it would answer instead of coffee.

"I don't know how it will be," she said, "but if we do not like it we can leave it alone."

"Be jabbers, av it tastes as good as it smells," declared Jerry, "sure it is a big bowl av it Oi'll be afther wanting mesel', d'ye moind."

"It certainly makes a fellow feel hungry," agreed Dick. "I wondered how any man could live here alone for so long a time, but this explains it. What a story the old hermit's life would make."

"Begorra, it would bate Crusoe out av sight, so it would."

"Not a doubt of it."

The repast ready, they all partook of it, and it was found to be not only agreeable, but satisfying.

While they ate they talked over their situation thoroughly, and it was decided that one of the first things to be done was to bring a goodly supply of water from the spring, in case they were besieged.

Not only so, but it would not be amiss for them to make every preparation for war, in case it was forced upon them. The cabin was strong, but it lacked loopholes, and these would somehow have to be provided. There were one door, and only one window, both solidly built.

The meal over, a more thorough search than ever was made of the cabin, and further implements were discovered, some of which could be made use of for the purpose required, although their exact office could not be designated. And so, with these to work with, while Jerry and Freda brought water from the spring, Deadwood

Dick worked some loopholes between the logs.

He made them high up, so that a chance shot entering one of them would not do harm, unless one of the defenders happened to be at that particular loophole at the moment preparing to shoot at the foe without. He made three in the front, and two on each of the sides, and in order to make use of them it would be necessary to stand upon a block or bench, which he and Jerry prepared after the water had been supplied.

"There," announced Dick, at last, "we are ready for business. It may prove to have been needless labor, but if we should need it we'll need it bad, and here it is."

"And be jabbers, dhey will foind us at home av dhey call, d'ye moind," declared Jerry. "We are only three, but begorra we are good fur dhem while our powdher lasts, or Oi am no prophet. Phwat do ye say to dhat, Miss Payters?"

"I know you will try to make a noble defense, Mr. McHearty," was the response.

"Arrah, now, don't you be afther misthering me, but call me Jerry."

"All right; so I will."

"And now to another matter," intimated Dick. "If you will allow me to take that map you have, Miss Peters, I would like to study it a little."

"Why, certainly, sir; here it is."

She produced it and handed it to him, and Dick sat down by the table and spread it out before him.

He saw at a glance that it was the same map of which he had had a copy, but more elaborate in its details than the copy. If not the original, it must be a fac simile.

While he was poring over it, the others looking on over his shoulders, a shadow darkened the doorway.

All looked quickly in that direction.

There stood a man, covering them with a brace of revolvers, and to the momentary dismay of Dick and Jerry, they recognized Captain Volcano.

"Up with your hands!" was the order, and they had to obey, under the circumstances, for by the expression of Volcano's face he stood ready to shoot upon the slightest excuse.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he immediately laughed. "A fine trick you served us by bolting from our band, Jerry McHearty, coming back and digging this traitor out; but you shall pay for it by sharing the same fate with him now. You thought you were safe, no doubt, Bullet Bob, but you forgot Captain Volcano."

"Jerry did not dig him out, sir!" spoke up Freda, with spirit.

"Oh, ho! Then it was you, perhaps, my beauty?"

"Yes, it was I, sir."

Dick was taking in the situation with lightning rapidity, for he had no thought of submitting thus tamely.

"Might as well have left him there, miss, for you have had your labor for your pains. He has got to go back again, and this Irishman with him—Ha! it is the map, as I live!"

He caught sight of the map on the table, and started forward as if to take it.

Quick as thought, Jerry blew a strong breath at it, and it went flying across the table and to the floor on the other side.

"Curse you!" grated Volcano. "Were it not for the greater pleasure of burying you alive, I would bury a bullet into your heart this instant, you deserter—thief! No matter, I can wait a minute."

He had halted, even as Jerry blew the paper from the table, for he had recognized in time that his business for the present was to keep the advantage he had gained until some of his men came to his aid, for they were three to one against him, if he lost that advantage.

Deadwood Dick had not spoken as yet. "What have you got to say for yourself, Bullet Bob?" the captain of the band demanded.

"I have nothing to say," was the quiet answer. "You have got it all your own way, at the present moment, it seems; we are only passengers."

"Ha! ha! That is about so, I guess. But I mean, what have you got to say about that map? Can you deny now that you stole it from me, as I said you did? It is the same one."

"I do deny that I stole it, sir."

"In the face of its being found in your possession now?"

"Yes, I do. The fact of the business is, you never had it in your possession at all."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Long Scott cheated you nicely."

"That is a lie! He couldn't have done it, and me watching him all the time."

"All the same, he did do it. You had not the map in your possession, and consequently I could not steal it from you, as you charge."

Dick was watching his man like a hawk, waiting only for the slightest chance to spring upon him, but Captain Volcano was as watchful himself, and evidently did not mean to allow any such chance.

"That is true, sir," spoke up Freda, who was trembling with apprehension.

"What do you know about it?" Volcano demanded.

He turned his gaze upon her for the instant, as he asked the question, and that instant was sufficient for Deadwood Dick.

A thought had come to him, an idea so simple that that was his excuse for not having thought of it before, and no sooner had Volcano removed his gaze from him than he put it into execution.

CHAPTER X.

DICK TRUMPS THE TRICK.

In seating himself at the table to examine the map, Dick had taken advantage of the best light.

Opposite to him was the open window, its light falling on the table in front of him, where the map had been spread, and the location of the table was such that in taking that position he was partly behind the door.

The door, as we have shown, was of heavy make, and it opened all the way back against the rude wall of logs, having evidently been so arranged in order that it might not take up unnecessary room in the cabin when standing open, and the idea had come to Dick to close it with his foot.

Captain Volcano was standing just within the doorway, and the moment he looked in the direction of the young woman, Dick, as said, acted.

Without moving his hands or the upper part of his body, he caught his toe behind the door and exerted all the power of his leg to close it, and it swung to with force.

Captain Volcano saw it coming, but altogether too late to avoid it, for about the same instant that he was aware of it the door caught him with a terrific blow and hurled him backward out of the doorway and flat upon his back some distance from the cabin!

One of the revolvers he had in his hands went off, but did no damage to any one, though it served the purpose of attracting the attention of one or two of his men who were not far away.

Their shouts were heard almost instantly. "Quick!" cried Deadwood Dick. "Secure that window, Jerry!" And he himself leaped to fasten the door.

"Be jabers, it is that same Oi will!" averred Jerry, responding with alacrity. "Sure, Oi thought it was gone gossoons

we wur' that toime, allanah! Ye are a jewel, so ye are!"

"So we would have been, too, if he had taken advantage of the chance and shot us," assured Dick. "As it is, we are up again for another round, and I think we will make it interesting for him before we get done with him. Hear him! He is well named Volcano."

The captain had regained his feet, and was belching out oaths like a miniature Vesuvius.

"Begorra, it is a shot Oi'll thry at him!"

Jerry had secured the window, and stepping upon the bench that had been arranged for the purpose, he looked through the loophole.

Volcano was in plain sight, angrily vociferating and waving his revolvers, and a couple of men were running towards him from the other side of the open space.

"Get out av dhat, ye spalpeen!" cried Jerry, and with the words he fired a shot, missing his man, but evidently coming unpleasantly near.

Volcano ceased his shouting instantly, and made a dash for the shelter of the nearest tree.

"Begorra, Oi made him kick up dust thot toime!" laughed Jerry.

Dick, too, had now placed himself at one of the loopholes, and was taking a survey of the situation without.

The other two fellows, following the example of their captain, were making tracks for the shelter of the trees, and Dick sent a bullet after one of them to make him hustle.

He had not fired to kill; it was too much like murder, for the fight was not yet on in earnest.

"Phwy didn't ye dhrup him?" demanded the belligerent Celt.

"Time enough for that when it becomes necessary," Dick responded.

They turned to see what Freda was doing, and found her with a couple of revolvers in her hands.

Her face was pale, but her lips were set in a firm line, and there was an expression of grim determination upon her face that boded ill for somebody.

Volcano and his men had that morning made all haste back to the tunnel where they had left Bullet Bob buried alive, hoping to find Jerry McHearty still there, with what result we know.

In looking around to find the trail, in order to follow them further and capture or kill them, he and his men had separated, and Volcano had been the first to discover the cabin, which, by the way, could not be seen from the ledge or plateau above.

The pistol shot, as said, had drawn the attention of others, but it had come too late to be of any advantage to them at present.

"What do you think they will do?" the young woman inquired.

"That remains to be seen," answered Dick. "No doubt they will try to get us out of here somehow, and, failing in that, will station a guard here for the purpose of keeping us in."

"Terrible! It can do us no harm for a little while, but you know that we cannot stand a long siege of that kind."

"We must try to outwit them," assumed Dick.

"Begorra, dhat is dhe talk!" cried Jerry. "And, by dhe same token it is yersel' dhat can do dhat same."

"That, too, remains to be seen," opined Dick. "We are in no immediate danger, and we will let the future take care of itself, taking advantage of anything that offers meantime."

"Be jabers, it is calling he is!"

Sure enough, Captain Volcano was hailing them.

"Hello, Bullet Bob!" he called out again. "Bullet Bob!"

"Well, what is it?" shouted Dick.

"Let us come to terms, no use our fighting. That scored one for you, and ought to make us even."

"Begorra, it is thrying to fool ye he is," whispered Jerry. "Oi scint dhe flavor av dhe blarney stone in dhat, so Oi do. Tell him to go to the divil, dhe omadhaun!"

"He cannot fool me," assured Dick, and then he shouted:

"What terms do you offer?"

"Well, you give me back that map, and I will give you each a horse and let you take the back trail."

"That sounds fair enough, but in the first place, we have got no paper that belongs to you; and in the second place, I know that you are lying, and would not keep your word."

"You have got that map; I saw it."

"Even so, but I did not get it from you. On the other hand, you have got a paper of mine."

"Then you will not take the terms I offer?"

"No; not a take!"

"Then what do you expect to do about it?"

"We are going to fight it out. Knowing your intention, there is nothing else we can do."

"Well, you won't do that for long, curse you!" was the eruption, seeing that his good intention to deceive was readily penetrated. "We'll have you out of there in an hour!"

"Perhaps you will; that remains to be tested."

"If we can't, then we can starve you there, like rats in a trap! You will be glad enough to beg terms!"

"Be jabers, it does look so, too," acquiesced Jerry, in a low voice; "but, all dhe same, we will not let him know dhat we bel'ave it. Oi would loike to have me two hands on his t'roat, so Oi would!"

"You stand by me," said Dick, "and we will come out on top yet, you bet."

"Oh, sir, do you think we can escape?" asked Freda.

"Yes, if you will show some of the grit that brought you across that desert alive, we will," assured the invincible.

At that instant a bullet zipped in at one of the loopholes, and buried itself high up in the opposite wall, and it had come unpleasantly near to Deadwood Dick's head.

A report was heard simultaneously, and Dick turned quickly and looked in the direction whence the shot had come. There was a little cloud of smoke rising near the tree behind which Captain Volcano was sheltered, showing that he was the one who had fired.

Dick responded, sending a bullet into the body of the tree as a reminder that he had not forgotten the art that had given him his name of Bullet Bob, and by this exchange of compliments the war was duly declared begun.

"Thry it again, ye spalpeen!" shouted Jerry McHearty. "Begorra, it is at home we are, ye divil's own delegate that ye be!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE SCHEME TRIED.

"Well, Jerry, now we are in for it," asserted Deadwood Dick.

"Yis, be jabers, and it is glad Oi am that I am in it wi'd ye'rsel', and not out there foighting' against ye."

"You may be sorry before you get done with it, though. They have got the advantage of numbers, and they are likely to make it red-hot for us when they get down to business."

"All dhe same, we are bound to come out on top; didn't ye say so, sor?"

Dhey may have dhe advantage av numbers, but begorra we have dhe preponderance av brains and beauty, on me sowl! Let dhem come, now, and see if we don't give dhem fits!"

Dick and Freda had to laugh at Jerry's earnestness.

While talking Dick had stepped down from the bench that commanded the loopholes, in order to be out of danger.

He now stepped up again to take another survey of the situation without, but he did not look from the same loophole through which the bullet had come, but the one farthest from it.

When he looked he was just in time to see the two fellows who had taken shelter behind other trees, running to the tree where Captain Volcano was sheltered, dodging from tree to tree, like Indians, as they ran, and he was tempted to try a shot at them.

However, he did not do so then. He wanted to see what their game was going to be, for he rightly guessed that the captain had signaled them to come to him. They reached the tree where the captain stood, where they placed themselves in line so that the tree sheltered all three of them from the range of the cabin, and there they remained some minutes.

Presently, Dick saw one of them scurrying away through the woods, and he quickly disappeared.

Jerry, too, was looking out.

While they were looking at that fellow, there came another puff of smoke from behind the tree, and another bullet zipped into the cabin.

The middle loophole of the three was the one by which it came. Had either of the others been the one fired at, either Dick or Jerry would have received the bullet in his brain.

"Mither av Moses!" cried Jerry, ducking his head promptly, "but dhat was a close call!"

"That fellow is a dead shot," said Dick, coolly.

"Av he isn't he will be, av Oi get a crack at him!" Jerry declared.

"Can we not decoy him into exposing himself, so that you can get a shot at him?" asked Freda of Dick.

"How would you do it?" Dick asked.

"Why, let me hold something white up at the middle loophole, and if it can be seen, he may fire at it. At the same time you can be watching. But, no, there is too much risk to be run!"

"I catch your meaning, miss, and we will try it. It will, at any rate, prove whether or not they can see anything through the loopholes from that distance, and that will be something. But, what will you hold? Here is my handkerchief, not as white as it might be, but it will do."

The young woman took the handkerchief, and, putting it on a stick, she held it close to the middle loophole. Keeping it there for a moment, she removed it, then replaced it, then removed it again, and this she did several times, till they were on the point of deciding that it could not be seen from without, when suddenly there came a shot and the stick was struck.

Instantly the girl dropped it with a slight scream.

Her cry was heard, and it was instantly followed by a laugh from Captain Volcano.

"Ha! ha! ha! Which one of you got that dose? What do you think about it now, you rascals? Are you ready to give up the fight and surrender? It is your only hope."

"Be jabbers, it was the leddy ye hit, ye murtherin' villain!" instantly shouted Jerry McHearty. "Sure, it is no mercy ye made to explet now, av we get dhe ghost

av a peep at ye, ye bla'guard! Av ye thry to l'ave dhat tree, yer name will be Dinnis!"

"Ha! ha! ha! You are in a fine situation to make threats!"

There was no rejoinder.

"Phwat is going to be done?" asked Jerry.

"I am just trying to think," said Dick. "We ought to have a couple of new loopholes."

"Dhat is dhe idee, be gob! We'll make dhem while we wait, and dhey will never know we have got dhem till dhey get a taste av lead from out av dhem, by the powers!"

Dick set about this at once, and while the work was being done there came no further shots nor salutes of any kind.

The new loopholes were made higher up than the others, and between them, and were made smaller, so that they could not be seen at any great distance away from the cabin.

Dick had stood on the table while making them, and the table was left there as a handy means of reaching them when occasion required. And having them done, he ventured to take a look out through the one last completed, and as he did so an exclamation escaped him.

"Phwat is it?" asked Jerry.

"They mean to burn us out!" said Dick. "Heaven help us!" cried the young woman, anxiously.

"How are they going to do it?" she added the next moment.

"That remains to be seen," said Dick. "I fail to grasp the situation. They are getting together a lot of dry wood out there under the trees."

"Be jabbers, fetch dhem a shot dhat will stop dheir fun!" cried Jerry. "Av dhey are too far off to be hit, it will remind dhem dhat we are still at home and have our eyes upon dhem."

That was Dick's intent, and he was taking aim even while Jerry was speaking.

His gun soon spoke out, and its report was almost instantly followed by a howl of pain from out in the timber, and several shots were fired in return, the bullets burying themselves in the logs.

"Hooray!" shouted Jerry. "Dhat is one less!"

"No, I only winged him," said Dick. "Ha! they have fired the heap of brush now!"

Full of excitement, Jerry leaped upon the table, to look out at the other of the new-made loopholes, and the moment he took in the situation he uttered a cry.

"Yis, and be hivvins it is coming dhis way!"

"And what is bringing it?" asked Dick.

"Be jabbers, Oi dun'no'!"

"Nor I."

For the moment there seemed to be something marvelous about it. The bundle of brush, and it was no small bundle either, was coming steadily out into the clearing, as if by a power of its own.

It was all ablaze, being as dry as tinder, almost, and it was already roaring and crackling in a way that was surprising. If such a blaze as that could be carried up against the cabin, there was nothing to save the building from being burned to the ground.

"Ha! now I see," said Dick, in another moment.

"Yis, ye are roight; it is wi'd a rope dhey are bringing it, dhe murtherin' tha'ves!"

It was plainly seen now, a long, slender rope, composed of half a dozen lariats tied together, and it reached upward and over the cabin, proof that those who were pulling it were on the cliff against which the cabin abutted.

"We must stop that performance,

Jerry," said Dick. "I will try a bullet at the rope, and see if I can uphold my reputation as a crack shot."

"Dhat is just dhe ticket, sor! Begorra, ye must hit it av ye ever hit a mark in yure life."

"If I do, it will be by chance, for it is moving."

"Thry it! Thry it!"

Dick took deliberate aim, and, much to his own surprise, when his pistol spoke the rope parted, and the bundle of brush was left out on the open, halfway between the cabin and the edge of the clearing.

The brush had been loaded upon a part of a broken branch, to the end of which the rope had been tied, out of immediate reach of the flames, and now fully a quarter of the length of the rope lay there on the open where it could not be recovered without the risk of a bullet.

There was a howl immediately, and a volley of shots was fired at the cabin from behind the trees.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CABIN DEMOLISHED.

"Hooray! Hooray!"

So whooped Jerry, jumping up and down with delight.

"They have been granted a stay of proceedings for a little while, anyhow," said Dick, grimly.

"Ye are roight dhey have!" Jerry exclaimed. "Sorry a wan av dhem will be afther showin' himself out dhere to secure dhe rope afther a shot dhe loike av dhat."

"But there is another and greater danger," said the young woman, with trembling voice.

"What is that?" asked Dick.

"The cliff behind us!"

"Be jabbers!"

"I have thought of that," said Dick. "There is nothing we can do to stop them, if they attack us from that direction, and that is just what we may look for now."

"Then they have us at their mercy, after all."

"No use trying to disguise it. This cabin was not built for a fort, that is all too plain."

"Oh, sir; what shall we do? What can we do?"

"There is nothing we can do but wait," said Dick. "As the game now stands, they hold the best cards."

"But if we wait we are sure to be killed, are we not? What if they roll a big boulder down upon us from the top of the cliff? What if they lower a bundle of burning brush on the roof?"

"It is a grim situation, but if one of us goes out he will invite a bullet. It is about as broad as it is long."

"We have the hole here in dhe bank to get into," said Jerry.

"It would save us from the boulder, but not from fire," said Dick. "I wonder if there is not some other way out of here besides this one door? It seems to me that a man living here so long, a man smart enough to make such a lamp as this, to say nothing of the other things, would have made a safe way of retreat in case he ever got hemmed in as we are now. He had the Indians to look out for in those days. Let us have another search."

"Yes, yes," eagerly echoed the girl. "There surely must be a way of escape for us. Oh! why could he not have lived long enough to tell me all he wanted to tell me before he died?"

"Dhat's phwat's dhe matther!" cried Jerry.

At that instant a great thud was heard without, so heavy that it made the ground tremble.

"A boulder!" gasped Freda. "My God! The next one will be sent with surer aim."

and we shall be crushed out of existence! Quick! let us get into the hole in the bank!"

Another thud, even heavier than the first, and this time so close that some of the finer particles that came with it were heard to strike upon the top of the cabin. They were, indeed, in a perilous situation, and it looked as if they were doomed.

Deadwood Dick opened the door leading to the place in the bank where the hermit had stored his provisions, and pushed the young woman in.

"Stay there," he said, sharply.

His next move was to pull the couch from its place against the wall.

If there was any other means of exit from the cabin, it must be there, for every other part of the cabin was in sight.

There was nothing of the kind, however. The floor there was as solid as elsewhere, and that one ray of hope was dispelled almost as soon as it had been born.

At that instant a boulder struck the right-hand front corner of the cabin roof, tearing its way through not only the roof, but the floor as well, and following it were heard the exultant cries of the rascals who had rolled it over the edge of the cliff.

Dick and Jerry looked at each other, Jerry a good deal pale, and Dick somewhat so.

"Hello!" came a hail from across the clearing.

"Well, what is wanted?" demanded Dick, in savage earnest, and he leaped to the table to look out.

"Mercy!" cried Freda. "You will be crushed! Do not parley with them, for it is only a trick to get you where you will be killed. Come in here, I beg of you; we can secure the door from this side!"

"Phwat is dhat ye say?" cried Jerry, hastening to verify the statement she had made.

"There is a great, strong crossbar on this side of the door."

"Sure enough, so dhere is!"

Meantime, Captain Volcano had rejoined to Dick's demand.

"Will you surrender?" he called out, "or must we crush you under these boulders? Take your choice, and take it quick!"

Dick tried hard to catch a glimpse of the fellow, in order to try a shot at him, but Volcano Dan was too wary to expose himself. He did not show even his nose from behind his tree.

"Crush and be hanged to you!" cried Dick. "We intend to fight it out to the last minute."

"Yes, but think of the woman you have there."

"I shall remain," said Freda, quickly.

"She stays here with us!" shouted Dick.

"All right, then, if you will have it so," and Dick saw a hand make a motion behind a tree.

Judging what that motion meant, Dick leaped from the table and sprang to the rear end of the room, and he was not a moment too soon, for another boulder plunged through the roof with terrific force.

Again the fellows were heard to laugh.

Jerry called Dick's attention to the fastening on the other side of the heavy door that opened into the hole in the bank, and Dick was interested immediately. A new light brightened his face, and a smile curled his lips, as if he had made a discovery.

With haste he grabbed up the lamp, some of the tools and other things, and handed them to Jerry, who passed them in turn to Freda—all the vessels of water and everything that he could lay hands on at short notice that he thought would be of use to them, if by any means there

could be the least shadow of a chance for them after shutting themselves in the hole mentioned.

He had just sprung from the center of the room to the door of the vault, when an immense boulder came crushing through the very center of the roof, and it demolished both the table and the couch, and buried itself half out of sight under the floor.

It must have weighed nearly or quite two tons, and it had given Deadwood Dick about as close a call for his life as he had ever had.

There was no use delaying longer. He entered the vault and closed and secured the door.

No sooner had he done so, than another boulder, even larger than the one preceding, came tearing down through the remnant of the roof, striking the other with a sound almost like the report of a cannon, and, splitting, one half of it fell over against the door that Dick had just closed, effectually imprisoning the trio within the narrow confines of the vault.

Dick surmised this by the shock he felt against the door, but he said nothing to his companions.

"Light the lamp," he whispered. "Has anybody got a match?"

"Oi have dhat same," said Jerry.

He soon found one, and, striking it, he soon had the lamp burning and could look around them.

It looked as if they were in a death-trap even more effectual than the one from which they had escaped with their lives. It was a mere hole, nothing more.

The size of the vault was four feet wide by six feet in length, at a rough guess, and it looked to be, and no doubt was, almost if not indeed quite airtight. It had been dug into the bank, as said, and was shored up with timbers to preserve its existence.

No further boulders came down meantime, and while the trio were looking around their narrow prison they heard a voice calling to them.

"Hello!" was the call. "Speak out if you are alive!"

They did not respond, but waited.

Finally, after something like five minutes had passed, other voices were heard, and presently the besiegers made bold to approach the scene of their destructive attack.

"Great blazes!" the prisoners heard Captain Volcano exclaim. "We have done for them with a vengeance! Look there! We have buried them clear out of sight, and all our horses could not move one of those boulders out of its place. Well, they would have it so. Now for the treasure!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INSCRIBED STONE.

Jerry McHearty was on the point of making some sort of defiant exclamation, but Deadwood Dick checked him.

"Say nothing," Dick whispered, catching hold of his arm. "If they think we are dead, so much the better our chances on getting out of here—if we can get out."

"Roight ye are," agreed Jerry. "Oi only wanted to tell dhe gossoon phwat Oi think av him, but dhat will kape. As to gettin' out av here, be jabers we can dig out av it comes to it. Sure, dhe man dhat was born to be hanged will never be dhrowned, Oi truly bel'ave."

They were silent, then, for some minutes, listening for further words from those without, but no further sounds came to their ears.

"I think they have gone away," said Dick.

"Dhat same dhey have, sor."

"Look here!" suddenly exclaimed Freda. "What is this ring for?"

Dick and Jerry both looked, and the young woman held the light so that they could see.

In the floor of the vault in which they were imprisoned, a little distance from one corner, was an iron ring large enough for a man to grasp with both hands easily.

"Ha! you have made the discovery!" exclaimed Dick. "That is what I wanted to find, and you have found it."

"What is it, sir?"

"Why, a means of escape. I thought it strange that that old hermit, wise as he was, would live here so many years without having a means of escape in case he needed it."

"Be jabbers, it is a jewel ye are!" cried Jerry.

"It is nothing," the young woman disclaimed. "You or Mr. Deadwood Dick would have discovered it, anyhow."

"Which does not detract from the fact that you were the finder," said Dick. "Let me get hold of it and see what it will reveal. I perceive that the air is growing vitiated."

They stepped back and made room for him.

Dick cleared away the earth from around the ring and by the light of the lamp made a further discovery.

The ring was set in the center of a square stone, which in turn rested in a place that had clearly been made to receive it, and from which it was intended it should be lifted by means of the ring.

Bracing his feet on each side of the opening in which the stone lay, Dick took hold of the ring and pulled. It did not yield, however, until he had exerted all his strength, when it came free at last and he lifted it from its place, disclosing a dark depth below.

A grateful breath of cold air came to them, and instantly the lamp, which had been beginning to grow dim, brightened to its full power again.

"Lucky for us," said Dick. "We could not have stood it much longer without air."

"Av dhere is only a way out of dhis other hole," said Jerry.

"Not a doubt about that, I think," Dick encouraged.

"And then further dangers," sighed Freda.

Dick took the lamp from her hand, and by its help looked down into the vault beneath.

The light disclosed a series of rude stone steps leading downward, and setting down the lamp while he let himself through the hole, Dick took it up again and descended.

It was a natural cavern, maybe ten feet deep at that point, and a dark hole marked the place where a passage evidently led away into the earth. Dick took a good survey of the place, and having so done, called out to Jerry and the young woman who were waiting above.

"We must take our chances this way," he said. "Hand down all the articles we saved from the cabin, and all the water and provisions. We must make this our headquarters."

"And may it not be our last quarters as well!" exclaimed Jerry. "Here ye go, sor."

He handed the things down through the opening, Dick receiving them and taking them safely down and depositing them upon the floor of the lower vault, and that having been done, Freda and Jerry came down.

"How about dhe stone?" asked Jerry.

"It should be put back into its place, of course," said Dick.

He held the light while Jerry exerted himself to draw the stone into its place in the hole.

Presently he succeeded in doing so, after considerable effort, and no sooner had the stone dropped to its place than Deadwood Dick made a discovery concerning it.

The stone was really in two halves, one lying upon the other, and the bolt to which the iron ring was attached holding them together. By turning the under half part way around, its corners would lock over the under side of the opening, and nothing could lift it.

At the discovery Dick uttered an exclamation.

"Phwat is it?" asked Jerry.

"See if you can't turn the bottom half of that stone," Dick directed.

Jerry tried it, and it required some effort, showing that the trap could not have become locked accidentally.

"Yis, begorra!" he cried, joyously. "Be Hivvins, it is a king's army dhat could not get in at us now, so it is! Sure, dhat ould hermit had a wise old head on dhe two shoulders av him!"

"Yes, he had, indeed," acceded Dick. "I shall not be surprised at anything further we may discover, for he had ample time to work many wonders, in the seventy years that he lived here alone as guardian of the treasure."

"It was an age!" exclaimed Freda.

"Yes, truly, it was. And speaking of that treasure, what more likely spot than this for its hiding place?"

"Be jabbers, ye are roight!" avowed Jerry. "Av we foind it, it is all to ourselves we can kape it—dhat is to say, av it is all dhe same to you and dhe ledy."

"We will talk about that later," advised the leader.

Jerry had now come down the ladder, if such the steps could be called, and the next thing in order was the proper placing of the provisions and water so that nothing would be likely to happen to them.

That having been done satisfactorily, Dick led the way into the passage, carrying the lamp.

It was a dark and dismal place.

The passage was high and narrow, and had a downward slope. The footing was good, being of solid rock.

They proceeded slowly, saying but little, Dick ahead, Freda next, and Jerry bringing up the rear, and in this manner they continued, until at length they came into a cavern.

It was broad and high, and the light of the lamp was unable to penetrate to the end of it.

Directly in front of the way by which they had entered, stood a huge rock that looked like a pulpit, and on top of that was a smaller stone, with a glazed surface.

"What have we here?" asked Dick, advancing to it.

"O! give it up," from Jerry.

Dick held the lamp close to the stone upon which the light had been reflected, and to his surprise he found that it bore an inscription.

It was in three languages, the first Latin, as he rightly recognized; the second Spanish, and the third English. It was the latter he read, without wasting time with the others.

It read as follows:

"Discovered by me, Gibeon, and the V. T. removed to this place for safer keeping. Study map on other side, ye who of right may do so. None other can understand the meaning."

"Faith, phwat is dhe meaning of it, anyhow?" demanded Jerry.

"The V. T. means the Velasqua treasure, I take it," Deadwood Dick promptly decided.

"Yes, yes, you must be right," agreed Freda, excitedly. "Too bad my poor father could not have lived to reach here,

for it had come to be the one idea of his existence."

"Yes, too bad, indeed," repeated Dick; "but it was not so to be, evidently. However, you are here, and, if the old hermit's recognition counted for anything, you are no doubt one of the rightful heirs to the treasure. Little good Captain Volcano's map will do him now."

CHAPTER XIV.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

While speaking, Dick turned the stone around and was examining the other side of it.

It was a block of granite, highly polished, and the lettering and the map had been worked upon it with no little skill.

The map was clear and plain, but it was not, at first, readily to be understood. It took Deadwood Dick but a little while, however, to discover the key to it.

He judged, presently, that the rock upon which the stone had been discovered was the starting point, and that being the case, they must follow around by the left wall of the cavern until they came to a branching passage similar to the one by which they had entered, he judged.

At that point something was indicated on the map by means of a dot, and the map continued on to what was probably the opposite end of the cavern, where another passage was indicated, before which was the head of an arrow pointing outward. On each side of that, however, were two other arrows pointing inward, smaller than the first mentioned.

These two slightly converged, and a line drawn from them would indicate what was probably the center of the cavern.

"Phwat do ye make out av it, anyhow?" asked Jerry.

"Let me hear what you think about it first," responded the detective, to draw him out.

"Well, be jabbers, Oi think that av we go to dhe left we are roight, but av we go to dhe roight we are left!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Dick. "That is pretty well expressed, anyhow. You have the right idea of it, I think. Have you any opinion regarding it, Miss Peters?"

"I think that single arrow points the way out of the cavern," answered the young woman.

"And these other two indicate where the treasure is. My guess is that it is buried in the very center of this cavern, probably in a place cut into the solid rock floor."

"Yis, yis, dhat is it, fur a dollar!" asserted Jerry. "Come on wid yez, and we'll soon see!"

"We shall have to go to the extreme end first," said Dick, "and from there take the direction of the double arrows. Let us go around by the left, the way indicated."

Dick gave Jerry the stone to carry, and taking the lamp himself he led the way.

In due time they came to an opening leading from the cavern, and near it was a large stone, in relative position to the dot indicated on the map.

Pausing only for a moment, they passed on, and finally came to the other opening in the extreme end of the cavern, where Dick proceeded to make a careful examination of the floor.

"Ha! the arrow!" he presently exclaimed. "Now for the other two, and we shall have something to guide us."

"And here is one of them," spoke Freda, indicating a spot about two yards to the right of him.

"Then, begorra, dhe other should be about dhe same distance on dhe other side, sure."

Jerry hastened to look for it, and, sure enough, there it was!

"Now we ought to have another light," intimated the detective.

"Phwat fur?"

"So that this lamp could be carried straight out yonder until it reaches the point where these two arrows would meet if extended."

"And I have the means of making it," assured the young woman. "I put some of the old hermit's peculiar candles in my pocket, thinking they might come in useful."

"Excellent!" ejaculated Dick. "Give me one of them."

"If they will burn without the lamp, for which they were made," Freda suggested.

She took one of the candles from her pocket and handed it to Dick, who lighted it at once, and it was found that it would burn all right.

It did not throw so much light as the one enclosed in the lamp, but that did not matter, since it was sufficient for the purpose.

"Now, Jerry," ordered Dick, "you take the lamp and walk straight out in that direction, and I will remain here and call out to you when you get out of the course."

"All roight, sor. Be gorra, it will be loike sailing wid'out rudder or compass."

"I will be both to you," was Dick's assurance.

So Jerry started and Dick and Freda remained. Dick put the candle midway between the two arrows, and he took his place by one and the young woman by the other.

Jerry had evidently taken a straight start, and he was keeping his nose straight before his face as he walked. Dick had to call out to him only twice before he reached a point where he was told to stop, which Dick and Freda had agreed was about the right spot.

They hastened out to join him then.

"Now," cried Jerry, when they came up, "phwere is dhe hole?"

"Put down the lamp where you stand," advised Dick, "and we will all look for it."

He asked Freda for two more of the candles, in order that each might have a light, and, leaving the lamp there, they moved around it, closely scanning the cavern floor.

Jerry was the first to discover anything.

"Be jabbers, Oi have it!" he shouted.

"What is it?"

"Not a hole, allana, but another av dhem arrows," and Jerry jointed to it.

"True enough, there was another indicating arrow, not very large, and it pointed toward the side of the cavern around which they had come."

"Sure, it is dhe devil's own game, so it is," concluded Jerry. "Av it kapes on, phwere is it coming out, Oi dun'no!"

"I think I understand it now," advised Dick. "Take your lamp again and go straight in that direction."

"All roight; so be it. You are dhe boss av dhe job, sure."

Jerry fetched the lamp, and with that in hand and the stone bearing the map in his arm, he went forward.

Dick directed him, remaining by the arrow, and noting the direction of the light from time to time, till presently there came a shout from Jerry to the effect that he had come to the end.

Again did Dick and Freda hasten forward, and they now found Jerry sitting upon the stone that marked the entrance to the second of the passages of which mention has been made.

"It is as I thought," announced Dick. "This is the way to the hiding place of the treasure."

"Sure, ye thought it was buried out dhere in dhe middle," reminded Jerry.

"That was my first thought, but this was my second. Get up."

Jerry obeyed, and Dick took a closer look at the stone, almost immediately voicing an exclamation.

There was another of the mysterious arrows, a very small one this time, and it pointed straight into the passage. No doubt, now, but they were coming close to the end.

"A clever map and a clever plan," averred Dick. "That old man knew what he was doing."

"And, sure, he made dhem fur a man av sinse loike ye'rsei," supplemented Jerry.

"He made them so plain, you mean, that no one could mistake," Dick rejoined. "But come; we have not found the treasure yet."

He pushed forward into the narrow passage, holding the light above his head, and the others still carrying their candles, they had abundance of light for their purpose.

The passage was narrow, and continued so, and it wound around and about in a most erratic fashion. They hastened, filled with curiosity and fired with excitement, and what was their chagrin, presently, to find that the passage came to an abrupt ending.

They looked around for another opening, but none was there. It was a grim reality that they had come to the end of the passage, and they had seen nothing of anything that looked like a treasure. It was disappointing, truly. They had every reason to believe that it was there, but where was it? While they stood looking into one another's faces inquiringly, voices in the outer cavern alarmed them.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TABLES TURNED.

"Whist!" warned Jerry. "Phwat's dhat?"

"It sounds very much like our friends, the enemy," suggested Dick, grimly.

"Heaven forbid!" gasped Freda. "We shall be at their mercy again, if they catch us in such a trap as this!"

"That is so," agreed Dick. "Hence we must get out of the trap, if we can, while there is opportunity. Jerry, have you got any more matches in your safe?"

"Oi have dhat same."

"Out with the lights, then, every one," Dick ordered.

Which command was obeyed, and they were plunged in utter darkness.

"And phwat now?" Jerry inquired. "Sure, it is breaking our necks we shall be, wi'dout any loight to see phwere we do be going, allanna!"

"And a light would only reveal us and draw a bullet," intimated Dick. "We have got to travel in the dark until we can pass them and get out of the cavern. We have been over the ground once."

"Come on wi'd yez, dhen, and—"

"Hold on, not so fast. Every one must take off his boots, in order that our steps may not be heard."

"We will do anything, sir, anything; only tell us what to do," spoke Freda, in a frightened whisper. "We must escape them, somehow, no matter what the risk."

"That is the right view of it," said Dick. "Sit down and take off your shoes, the first thing. You the same, Jerry, and quick about it, too."

"Be jabbers, Oi am at it already!"

The voices were still heard, loud and seemingly exultant, and they appeared to be drawing nearer.

Dick removed his own boots, and having tied them together, he led the way out.

Freda followed close behind him, and Jerry right after her, so that they might not become separated.

It seemed a long distance back again into the main cavern, so many were the

crooks and turns of the passage, but finally they emerged, and were startled to find lights coming near.

"Quick! this way!" commanded Dick, in a low whisper, and he took hold of Freda's arm to aid her along.

The lights were moving down along the left-hand wall of the cavern, and Dick made a dash straight out toward the middle, running swiftly and silently, hoping to escape being seen, which they succeeded in doing. And having passed out of immediate danger of discovery, they stopped to look and listen.

There were two lights, evidently of pine knots.

Several forms were to be seen moving under them, and it was Dick's opinion that all their foes were there.

"We are bound to find it!" the three heard Captain Volcano exclaim.

"Ye are right we are!" echoed the voice of Henry Huke, or Hot Hen. "We are on the right track, I think."

"The most likely place in the world, I should say," chimed in John Peet. "May not find it right off, but I bet it is here somewheres."

"It certainly was gone from the place where it ought to have been, according to the map, if we found the right place," said Volcano Dan. "And when we hit on this I felt sure of the game."

"Lucky we found it."

"You bet! And we wouldn't if Bill hadn't fell into that hole."

"Ha! ha! ha! I reckon ye ther't ye had set out fer ther bad place, didn't ye, Bill?"

"Well, ruther, I did. But, hello! what sort of a place have we come to here, pards? Looks ter me like a passage that leads to somewheres; let's take a look along et."

"Yes, we'll see where it goes to," avowed Volcano.

So they turned into the passage from which Dick and his friends had so recently made their exit.

"Faith, and it's lucky fer us that we are not dhere now!" exclaimed Jerry Mc-Hearty, in whisper. "Sure, dhere would be rayson fur dhe wailin' av dhe banshee, av we were."

"And about as lucky for one or two of them, too," intimated Dick. "Come, now, is our chance, and no time to be lost. Let us get out while they are exploring that passage, and we may be able to turn the tables upon them in a way they won't relish."

"Do you mean to capture them?" asked Freda.

"I mean that we will entrap them here, if that can be done, and they will be at our mercy."

"Cushla machree!" cried Jerry, even more loudly than was prudent. "Av we can do dhat same, Deadwood Dick, it will be dhe foinest thrick dhat was ever played on dhem!"

"Come!" enjoined Dick again, and holding Freda by the hand, he hastened in the direction of the passage which they had taken to be the way of exit from the cavern, if their opinion regarding the arrow on the map and again on the cavern floor was correct.

In the utter darkness their progress was slow, and it took them some time to reach the wall, and when they did so they did not at once find the passage.

Dick and Jerry felt along the wall in two directions, with a signal agreed upon by which the first one to discover it was to apprise the other two.

The signal was soon given, Jerry being the fortunate man, and they were soon safely in the passage, and probably out of sight from the cavern.

Dick then proposed that they put on their boots again and light the lamp, tak-

ing the slight risk of a surprise and a shot, though he hardly thought there was any danger. The others were not ready to return yet, and if any one had been left behind, he would think the light belonged to his own party.

Accordingly, this was done, and soon they were again shod and had a light to guide their footsteps.

"There is one thing that I am sorry for," remarked Dick, as they proceeded.

"And phwat is dhat?" asked Jerry.

"The food and water we left behind us in that upper chamber."

"Begorra, ye are roight, but we couldn't foresee dhis, so no use crying about dhat."

"Besides," added Freda, "if we can get hold of their supply it will be more than an equal exchange, for I can well imagine that we shall have the best of the bargain."

"You are right there," acquiesced Dick, "for we'll have the horses. What I was thinking about, though, we shall not so soon be able to starve them out and renew our search for the treasure. But we can afford to wait, if we succeed that far."

They hurried on, and finally came to what seemed to be the end of the passage.

A ray of daylight was seen, and it disclosed a great heap of fresh earth, with brush and grass and twigs protruding from it everywhere.

"Ha!" exclaimed Dick. "I see. This is where John Peet fell into the hole, as we heard them saying. The earth caved in and let him down, and so their discovery of the cavern was by chance."

They pushed forward, climbed up over the pile of debris, and Dick was soon out through the opening and once more in the open air.

He took a hasty survey of the situation around, and with the result that he gave a quick signal to Jerry and Freda to maintain silence. He had made a discovery.

Lending a hand to Freda, and then to Jerry, to help them out, he at once pointed out his discovery to them.

In a little glade down among the trees were the horses of Volcano and his men, with one man on guard.

"You two remain here," advised Dick, "and do not let a man of them come out. I will soon bring that fellow to terms, or my name is not Deadwood Dick. I could pick him off from here with a bullet, but that would be too much like assassination to suit me."

Freda and Jerry assured him of their ability to hold the others down the passage, and Dick, with a gun in hand, crept slowly and cautiously in the direction of the horses and the man who was guarding them, whom he soon recognized as Ben Small, the fellow whom he had wounded by the shot from the cabin earlier in the day and once before.

CHAPTER XVI.

VOLCANO TRIES A RUSE.

Ben was seated upon a pile of saddles, smoking a pipe, and tenderly and affectionately nursing his wounded hand.

Dick wanted to steal down behind him and get close to him before his presence became known, and so take the fellow by surprise, but an accident happened to foil that.

He was nearly out from the trees, when, of a sudden a twig broke under his foot with a loud snap, and Ben Small was upon his feet like a flash.

Dick, however, had him covered with a brace of guns.

"Bullet Bob!" the fellow gasped.

"Yours truly, Ben!" saluted Dick, smiling. "Don't you try to draw, or I shall have to hurt you."

"You have got the drop beautifully, Bob, so there is no use my trying to squirm, with this lame hand besides. But I thought you was dead and buried out of sight."

"Well, you find that I ain't. Where is the captain?"

"He has gone off to look for that treasure, and I am left here to guard the hosses."

"Well, I must ask you to drop that gun, Ben, for I will take care of the horses myself until the captain's return, when I'll try to take care of him, too."

"You had better kill me outright, Bob, than ask me to do that, for Captain Volcano will kill me, anyhow, if you don't, for letting you get the drop on me in this way. My life won't be worth a cuss. If you want your own hoss, take that, but leave—"

"Can't do it, Ben. I am going to have all or none. Put up your hand, now, or I'll be obliged to cork you."

There was no help for it, and the fellow held up his hand.

In another moment Dick had disarmed him.

While this was being done, the fellow wanted to know how his captor had escaped, and all about it, but Dick did not enlighten him to any great extent.

"Time enough for you to learn all that later on," he responded. "For the present I must make a prisoner of you, if you have no objections—and whether you have or not; it can't be helped."

"But, Bob, I am wounded, and you wouldn't tie up a wounded pard, would ye?"

"Business is business, and you are no pard of mine."

Dick did spare the wounded arm, however, but tied the sound one to the fellow's body tightly so that he could make no use of it. And having done that, he further secured him by tying him to a tree.

Having finished, he hurried back to the place where he had left Jerry and the young woman.

"Be jabbers, ye got him nate!" admitted Jerry.

"Yes, he is all right," assured Dick.

"Have you heard anything of the others?"

"Divil a thing at all, sor. Oi suppose they are lookin' fur dhat treasure, and it may be an hour before they will come this way again."

"Yes, more than likely you are right. Well, we are here ready for them, and while we wait suppose you go down there and make a dinner for us. You are handy at that. Bring ours up here, you know, and give Ben something to stay his stomach, too."

"Glad enough Oi will be to do dhat same, sor. Av ye want me, ye have only to shout fur me, and it is here Oi will be instanter."

So Jerry went off to perform the duty assigned to him, and Dick and Freda sat there by the hole in the ground to keep watch, and while they waited they conversed.

Jerry prepared something to eat, to which they all did ample justice, and still nothing had been heard from the men down in the cavern.

It was fully two hours before they were heard coming.

"Whist!" from Jerry, in whisper. "Oi belave Oi do be hearing dhem!"

"Yes, they are coming," assumed Dick, coolly. "Miss Peters, you stand further back out of immediate danger."

"I want to take my share of the danger with you, sir," the young woman protested. "I am a good shot, and I will stay here with you. You will need me, if they make a rush."

"No, you must fall further back," in-

sisted Dick, sternly. "Remember, the captain is a dead shot, and if he gets sight of a head he will send a bullet crushing into it. By the way, Jerry, you remember the same, and do not foolishly expose yourself."

"Begorra, it is dhat same Oi am not anxious to do, you bet."

Dick quickly placed them where he wanted them, while he himself remained nearest the hole.

By this time Captain Volcano's voice could be plainly heard, and he was cursing at the fate that had deprived them of their torches, whatever it had been. They had probably burned out.

"We'll get more, though," he growled, "and we'll finish the job if it takes a month of Sundays to do it; Great blazes!" he the same moment erupted, "look here! Whose tracks are these here in the dirt? They have escaped, by blazes they have escaped!"

"And right hyar, too," supplemented Hot Hen, "where they would come right out onto Ben and the hosses!"

"Hurry out of here, all of you!" thundered Volcano.

"Hold! The first head that appears above the ground here will get a bullet!"

That was what they heard.

And they well knew that Dick meant it this time to the letter. They were two to one, and Captain Volcano was a dead shot with the pistol. Dick had the advantage and must hold it.

The captain's answer was a bellow, something like the eruption of a real volcano in miniature.

"Who in blazes are you?" he cried.

"Bullet Bob, at your service!" was the response. "If you want to test my shooting quality, just show me a mark."

"Curse you, how did you get out there? You can't hope to keep us in here; we are two to one against you, and maybe more! Out and at him, men! We are good for 'em!"

There was immediately a scramble.

"Fair warning!" Dick shouted. "The first head that comes in sight gets a bullet, and the second one ditto!"

They came on, however, the captain exclaiming the traitor, as if with the purpose of disturbing Bob's aim, and the next instant a couple of hats appeared.

Dick fired two shots almost simultaneously, and each of the hats was punctured with a bullet, but, of course, there were no heads in them; it had been merely a ruse to draw his fire, and it had been successful. Dick, however, had not been deceived by it.

"Take that as a reminder," he called out. "The first head gets the same kind of a greeting."

"Curse you!" grated Volcano. "Let us out of here!"

"On one condition," was responded.

"What is it?"

"That you come up one at a time and leave your weapons behind you, and come with your hands held up over your heads."

There was a pause, during which the hum of their voices was heard, then Captain Volcano called out:

"We will do it. You have got the best hand, and we have got to come to your terms."

"Be jabbers, dhere is a thrick in dhat!" whispered Jerry.

"I know it," assured Dick, "but we hold the joker. You must take care of the man that comes up, and I will take care of the rest while you are doing it."

"What do you say?" called Volcano.

"All right; send up the first man," ordered Dick. "You are fairly warned, though, not to try any trick."

"We don't intend to, if you don't. Here comes John Peet, and we will see

how you use him. Say when you are ready for the next man, and he will come; you have got the best of us."

"I am well aware of that part of it," retorted Dick. "Come along, Peet, with your hands up high."

He was heard moving, and a pair of hands were soon seen.

"Come right along wi'd ye, Johnny," called Jerry McHearty. "Sure, Oi am waiting fur ye, and it will be me pleasure to introduce ye to Benny Small, so it will. Come roight along, now."

Mr. Peet put his head timidly above the level, and finding that he was still alive, got on up and out.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LONG VIGIL.

John Peet was, perhaps, the largest man of the band.

Deadwood Dick had seen through Captain Volcano's ruse from the first moment of the proposition.

He would send out Peet, have him engage in a struggle, if chance offered, or perhaps make use of a concealed weapon, and in the same moment the others would dash upon the scene.

Dick had given a few hurriedly whispered directions to Jerry, and they were prepared.

"Come roight dhis way!" Jerry called out, "and at dhe first sign av shoot or thrickery, down goes yure shanty, be gob!"

He had his weapons in hand and had Mr. Peet covered, so that it was impossible for him to attempt to draw a gun without running the risk of his life in doing it.

This the fellow saw, but he advanced at Jerry's bidding, and when he came near he suddenly felt something cold behind his ear.

"Move one inch and you are a dead man!"

It was a female's voice.

Freda was performing her part!

"Dhat same ye are, be jabbers!" assured Jerry. "Wan minute, now, and Oi will make ye secure."

At that moment the fellow Peet gave forth a short, sharp whistle.

This was a signal agreed upon, as the immediate result proved, for a scramble was heard down in the hole, and a head popped into view.

Crack! went one of Deadwood Dick's guns, and Billy Davids rolled down upon Captain Volcano and the others, with a bullet in his brain. Their charge was checked instantly—nipped in the bud.

"I gave you fair warning," called out Dick, "but you would not heed it. You are two men short, now, Captain Volcano, for your smartness."

"We'll see who will win, curse you!" was the venomous retort.

"Why, we will win, of course," Dick cheerily returned.

"Don't be too sure of that. We have food and water down here, and we can stand it a while."

"We have more out here and can stand it longer," Dick rejoined. "You may as well give up now as later on, but you can take your choice, of course."

"We will stay here, and the tables will turn before long, let me tell you. You will beg for mercy at my feet, but no mercy will you get. Your fate next time will be worse than the last!"

"Bah! go 'long wi'd ye!" cried Jerry, having secured his prisoner. "We intend to roll boulders into dhe hole and block it up."

"There is one favor we would ask," from Volcano.

"Name it!" from Dick.

"Throw us down some sticks that we may use for torches. We are in the dark."

"You might as well ask us to supply you with food and water so that you can hold out against us," suggested Dick. "That is not to our purpose."

"Be jabbers, dhe wondher is dhat ye did not be affther askin' fur a feather bed," chimed in Jerry. "Sure, dhe dark will do ye good, and will dhe sooner make ye want to get out av dhere."

"See here, Bullet Bob," petitioned Volcano.

"Well, what is it?"

"Can't we come to terms?"

"Easily enough, if they are my terms and you will agree to them."

"I don't mean that. I mean can't we strike a bargain to call a truce and look for the treasure together?"

"And what then?"

"Why, share and share alike, if we find it."

"It would not be ours to share, sir. There is one obstacle in the way of that, even if there were no others."

"Not ours! Whose, then?"

"Well, this lady here is one of the heirs to it, if I mistake not. No, we can come to no such terms, and the matter may as well be dropped. And there is another thing that may as well be dropped, too."

"What is that, curse you?"

"The name by which you have known me—Bullet Bob."

"What, then, is your name? Who in thunder are you, anyhow?" Volcano demanded, excitedly.

"Well, I am the chap known as Deadwood Dick, Junior—"

"Deadwood Dick!"

"Yes. It seems you have heard of me, and you may have heard that I make no terms with fellows of your stripe. There is only one thing for you to do, and that is, surrender."

"And I'll never do it, by blazes! You may be Deadwood Dick, but I am Captain Volcano, and I am your match, any day. You have never run up against me before, or you would not be here to-day, mark you that. We defy you, and we will fight it out!"

"All right; just as you please, but you are in a bad position to do any fighting, it strikes me."

"You may change your mind about that, curse you!"

"We'll see."

Captain Volcano and the three men with him were heard to retreat along the passage, and Dick relaxed his watch a little.

"Well, what do you think of it, John Peet?" he asked.

"If I had known who you was, not a finger would I 'a' lifted against ye," was the reply.

Dick gave orders what should be done, Jerry and Freda carrying them out, and he in person remained on guard at the opening to the cavern, prepared for any ruse.

At the same time he kept a look out in all other directions as well, for he did not mean to be taken by surprise if he could help it, if the fellows by any chance discovered any other means of exit from the cavern. They would not find him napping.

Night came, and nothing further had been heard from the prisoners in the cavern.

It was Dick's opinion that they had purposely waited for night.

"Phwat is to be done about it now, sor?" inquired Jerry McHearty, as he scratched his head for an idea.

"There is nothing we can do but keep up the watch, Jerry," answered Dick. "It is going to be a game of stay now, and the best stayer will win."

"Yis, but it is getting dark, and ye can't see dhem."

"We will have a fire. You set to work and make one, close to the opening there, and you will have to keep it going all night. We must not close our eyes, for if we do it will mean death to us."

"Be jabbers, Oi will stand by ye as long as Oi can stand on me two pins, so Oi will!"

The fire was made, and the night's vigil was commenced.

Blankets were provided for Freda, and Dick insisted upon her seeking rest and sleep, although she wanted to remain up and take her share of the watching.

That was useless, however, for under the circumstances Deadwood Dick would trust no other eyes than his own.

The hours passed, and not a sound was heard from those under ground.

Jerry replenished the fire at intervals, and between times Dick allowed him to catch some sleep, having him within reach so that he could awaken him when the fire need his care again.

It was along in the small hours of the morning, after Dick had had the hardest kind of work to keep awake himself, that the first move was made. The fire was burning low, and Dick was on the point of calling Jerry to renew it, when the crown of a hat appeared out of the hole.

Dick knew that it was a ruse, but it was what he was waiting for, and in almost the same instant it appeared his pistol spoke and a bullet pierced it.

He could have waited, and in another moment have taken a life, but that was not his way.

Loud cursing immediately followed the shot.

"We are awake, you see," advised Dick, cheerily. "I tell you we have got you in a dead fix, and you might just as well make up your minds to it first as last."

"We'll see about that curse you!" was the retort from Captain Volcano. "We'll see who can stand it the longest. We can get some sleep down here, but you have got to be on your guard every moment. We'll see which side will give out first, curse you!"

"Yes, we shall see," agreed Dick. "Come again!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER.

The shot and the voices had awakened Freda and Jerry.

Jerry replenished the fire, and Freda tried to urge Dick to let her take his place for a time.

That was something Dick would not listen to, however, but he promised her, at last, that he would allow her to take his place after daylight, when he would sleep.

Nothing further was heard from the four men in the cavern, and daylight came at last.

During the day Dick slept, trusting to Freda and Jerry, but when it came night again he took up the vigil as before, and the game was continued. How long it could continue remained to be seen.

It was along in the morning hours, as before, when, without the slightest warning, a pistol shot rang out, and a bullet came within an ace of striking Deadwood Dick in the head. It had come from the direction of the opening, and yet he had seen no one.

He instantly changed his position, and as he did so another shot followed close upon the first, and he saw where it had come from and understood the clever ruse.

From inside the opening holes had been forced through the soil until at last one had revealed Dick.

Through that hole the shot had been fired.

Here was something Dick had not

thought of, though he believed that he had thought of about everything else.

Not knowing how many more holes of the same kind there might be, he had to be active and take some means of a severe sort to counteract the danger that threatened.

Jerry and Freda were awake, but Dick ordered them to remain where they were. He ran around to the left, where the nature of the ground was rocky, at the same time keeping close watch of the hole, and from that side came up behind the fire nearest the hole.

With a long stick Jerry had used to prod it, he got a hold under the fire, and lifting it suddenly, tumbled the whole thing over into the hole.

Loud yells were instantly the result.

"Hooray!" cried Jerry. "Be jabbers, phwy didn't we think av dhat same thrick long ago, Oi wondher!"

"We have thought of it now," rejoined Dick. "Pile on the wood, Jerry; and we will see how the fire will burn there. It will protect us against them, at any rate."

It was clear that they had no other means of exit, or they would long ago have made use of it. So the fire was made up afresh, directly over the entrance to the cavern, and the remainder of the night was spent undisturbedly. Nothing more was heard of the four fellows.

Not until nearly noon on the following day was anything heard from those in the cavern; then it came in the form of a cry for help.

Dick responded to it, and found it was Captain Volcano crying for quarter.

"Then do you surrender?" asked Dick.

"Yes, yes; we can hold out no longer. The smoke is killing us down here."

"A pity dhat we didn't kill dhem dhat way a good while ago, dhen," averred the Irishman. "It would have saved us all dhis toime watchin', begob!"

"We could have disposed of them long ago, by filling up the hole," assured the detective; "but we are human, I hope, and for that reason have given them every show possible, even at the risk of our lives."

The fire was drawn away from the mouth of the hole, but the heat was so great by this time that the rascals had to wait until nearly night before they could climb out. They were able, at last, however, and one by one they came forth, a sad and sorry lot, indeed.

Each of them held up his hands, and was promptly disarmed and bound, and the body of the one who had lost his life was recovered and buried.

On the day following, Dick and Freda made another search of the cavern, leaving Jerry to guard the prisoners, for Dick had seen enough of the Irishman to feel sure that he could trust him.

Dick had now a new idea concerning the hiding place of the treasure, and went almost directly to the spot where it was concealed. Going first to the entrance to the passage where lay the stone bearing the arrow-head, he took the exact direction of that arrow.

It indicated a point on the right side of the passage, near the first bend, and a careful scrutiny there presently disclosed a seam where a block had been fitted into a square hole and neatly disguised by filling the crack with a fine cement. Indeed, he would probably not have found it at all, had it not been for the fact that the stone bore two small arrow-heads, point to point.

Procuring some of the tools which had been saved from the cabin, the block of stone was forced out of its place, and there, in a place that had been cut out to receive it, lay a great quantity of gold, gleaming under the light of the lamp.

"At last!" cried Freda. "It is just as my poor father imagined it—gold, gold, gold! I am sorry that he could not have lived to see it."

"It was not so to be," returned Dick, in sympathy. "Even if he had reached here, do you think that he would have been able to discover it, Miss Peters?"

"No, no; it is probable that he would not have been able to do so, sir. We should no doubt have been killed, and those robbers would have found it and carried it away."

"Well, it must remain here for a time longer," decided Dick. "I will take enough of the pieces to prove that I have found it, and you shall go with me and assert your claim to a portion of it, which I think will be recognized."

Accordingly Dick took two handfuls of the gold, and having done so, he replaced the block of stone and sealed up the crack as well as he could with dirt found on the floor. They made their way out, then, to where they had left Jerry and the prisoners. Jerry had been true to his trust, and everything was safe.

On the following morning the start was made, and that journey, if its incidents were all recorded, would make another romance as long as this, though perhaps not so momentous.

At the first principal town, they came to, after the perilous journey of the desert had been made, Deadwood Dick delivered his prisoners up to the officers; then he and Jerry and the young woman pressed onward into Mexico, where Dick had to report the success of his mission.

Volcano had tried to turn the tables upon Dick, by denouncing him as an outlaw himself, but it so happened that Dick was well known in that very town, and it took but a few minutes for him to brush that charge away. On the other hand, Captain Volcano was a gentleman who was badly wanted, and they were highly elated at getting hold of him.

Volcano Dan and his pard, Long Scott, had robbed and murdered an old couple living just north of the Rio Grande, and it was probable that from them they had stolen the map of the hiding place of the Velasque treasure. Be that as it might, the fact remained that they had committed such a crime, and that soon after it they had set out for the desert. Long Scott, however, was in failing health, and agreed to sell out his interest to Volcano Dan for a thousand dollars. The offer was accepted, but it resulted in a cheat.

What Long Scott did with the map later has been shown.

Deadwood Dick's report of his gold find was received by the Mexican government, and he was loaded with honors for his success.

Miss Peters was easily proven to be one of the heirs to the treasure, when her family was looked up. Her claim was honorably admitted, and she received a fortune out of the treasure.

Deadwood Dick had, meantime, guided a body of men across the desert to the treasure cave, and the gold had been safely conveyed to the Mexican capital, where Freda Peters received her rightful share. Dick's own reward was ample, and that of Jerry McHearty was more than he deserved.

Jerry had fallen desperately in love with Freda, and, when he made the fact known, he was joyfully surprised to find that his love was not altogether hopeless. Freda admitted that she liked him, and the fact that she liked him well enough to marry him proved that she liked him pretty well. They settled there in Mexico, where they have one of the finest of estates.

As for Deadwood Dick— Well, his is a life of adventure, and further adventures awaited him.

THE END.

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